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The Prison of Immigration:

An Ethnographic Study on Waiting, Uncertainty and Masculinity Among Male Migrants in Portugal

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the production, negotiation, and lived experience of masculinity among male migrants in Portugal, with a specific focus on the conditions of waiting and uncertainty. These include waiting for residency permits, employment, family reunification, and for clarity regarding their future in Portugal. Although migration to Portugal has increased significantly in recent years, the gendered aspects of the migration experience, and particularly in the ways in which waiting and uncertainty influence masculine identities, remain underexplored. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how migration both shapes and, is shaped, by the masculine identities of male migrants as they navigate uncertainty in Lisbon.

The empirical foundation of this study draws on nine months of ethnographic fieldwork in Lisbon, combining participant observation, fieldnotes, and semi-structured interviews with five male migrants: Raj from India; Omar, Tariq and Mohammed from Pakistan; and Wei from China. The analysis draws on theoretical perspectives from transnationalism, intersectionality, and temporality, to examine how migrants navigate their everyday lives across social, legal, and spatial boundaries.

The findings indicate that male migration is closely intertwined with gendered expectations of provision and responsibility. For the participants, migration is initially conceptualized as a means to achieve normative ideals of masculinity, especially through economic provision for transnational families. One participant described the condition of waiting as the 'prison of immigration', a term that captures the defining experience of suspension that is present in all five accounts. Each participant has experienced prolonged periods of legal and social liminality, in which their ability to fulfill provider roles and maintain masculine roles is significantly constrained.

Each participant negotiated these constraints in distinct ways. The brothers maintained a collective masculine identity through shared brotherhood, resilience, and cultural values. Raj adapted by reimagining himself as a cosmopolitan businessman and traveler despite his circumstances. Wei preserved his masculine self-image through differentiation and aspiration, insisting that Portugal was never his intended destination. These findings suggest that masculinity is not a fixed set of characteristics, but as a dynamic and relational process shaped by structural constraints, temporal uncertainty, and shifting responsibilities. This thesis argues that the 'prison of immigration' is not only a bureaucratic phenomenon, but also a gendered one, and that recognizing this dimension reveals aspects of the male migrant experience that administrative and legal frameworks alone cannot capture.

Keywords: Hegemonic masculinity, transnational migration, intersectionality, liminality, temporality, waiting, ethnography, Portugal

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1 Introduction

Migration is not a phenomenon that is new, as people have been on the move throughout human history. Yet, fundamental questions remain, such as what makes someone leave behind their families, friends and homes, what drives the decision to migrate, and who the people migrating are. These questions continue to shape how we approach and understand migration as a social, legal and personal experience.

To better understand the migrant experience, this thesis will examine male migration through the lens of masculinity and waiting, focusing specifically on the experiences of male migrants in Portugal seeking support from a specific organization in Lisbon. It aims at proving how masculinity motivates migration, how the experience of migration looks and feels like for the people involved, and what obstacles they encounter in the host country. A central concern and theme for this thesis is waiting; a reoccurring and significant feature of the migration experience for the men whose lives and stories form the basis of this research. The participants describe being caught in a state of uncertainty, as they are waiting for employment, for residency permits, and family reunification processes to be resolved. By focusing on waiting, the thesis aims to contribute to a better understanding of male migration in Portugal, by examining how waiting shapes, and is shaped, by masculinity. As gender shapes not only who migrates and why, but also how the migration experience is lived, felt, and navigated, it cannot be overlooked or ignored.

First, migration is frequently understood as a masculine project, driven by hegemonic ideals of provision, ambition, and responsibility toward one's family (Donaldson and Howson 2009, 210). The decision to leave one’s home country is rarely gender-neutral, but is often bound up with expectations of what a man should do and who a man should be. Second, the empirical data shows how waiting continues to affect the masculine identity. When bureaucratic processes stand in the way of a man from working, providing, or reuniting with his family, they do not simply delay his migration journey, but threaten the masculine identity that motivated his departure in the first place. Third, transnational life adds an extra layer of pressure that is distinctly gendered (Donaldson and Howson 2009, 211). The participants in this research do not only navigate waiting in Portugal, but do so while simultaneously maintaining roles and responsibilities that extend across borders, creating a layered and specifically masculine form.

Bringing masculinity in when researching migration and waiting is therefore not only an analytical choice, but a necessary one to understand the full complexity of what these men experience.

This is not to say that migration cannot be a female project, as women migrate in significant numbers and for equally complex reasons, and the female migration experience carries its own gendered dimensions (Hearn and Howson 2009, 50). However, this thesis deliberately limits its focus to masculinity and male migration, both because of the empirical context of the research where male migrants were significantly overrepresented in the field site, and because of the specific relationship between masculine ideals of provision and the experience of waiting that emerged as central to the participants' accounts. This is not to suggest that the female experience is less significant, but rather to recognize a focused and grounded examination of one gendered experience, rather than generalizing both.

Throughout several, if not all, of the conversations I have had with migrants at the organization, waiting emerged as a recurring and defining theme. The migrants I spoke with described waiting for stability, and for a sense of certainty about their lives and futures in Portugal. Waiting then appeared to structure their everyday lives in fundamental ways, grounded in a deep and persistent uncertainty that shaped how they moved. It was this recurring theme that led me to place waiting at the center of this thesis. Equally present across all accounts was the transnational dimension of their migrant lives. Regardless of where participants came from, or how long they had been in Portugal, they continued to nurture and uphold their ties to their home countries, maintaining relationships, responsibilities, and identities that extended beyond the host country. Their ongoing relationships between Portugal and their home countries, proved significant and difficult to separate from the experience of waiting.

This thesis grew out of my nine months of living and working in Lisbon. The experiences I witnessed and the stories I was trusted with made it impossible to approach migration as a neutral or administrative process. Migration, as I came to understand it, is a deeply human and gendered experience, and it is precisely this understanding that this thesis seeks to bring into the conversation.

Walking through the city, I began to notice patterns that sparked my curiosity; certain streets were visibly dominated by migrant men gathered outside, as hundreds of men were hanging out in the street, working in shops, and selling Nepalese, Bangladeshi or halal-food, driving

taxis, and serving in restaurants. This led me to think about the migrant women, as in most of these cases, they were not to be seen in these spaces. This was not an absolute observation, there were of course female workers and participants in public life, but the imbalance was striking and persistent enough to raise questions about where the women were, and why men seemed to occupy these visible, public-facing spaces in such a disproportionate way.

Working at a local non-governmental organization, I noticed the same pattern. The majority of people I encountered in the shared spaces of the organization were male migrants. This raised the same question again about where the women were, and what might explain their different relationships and presence in these spaces. These observations, accumulated over time and across different settings, ultimately shaped the direction of this research. This thesis brings this empirical material into dialogue with existing theoretical and literature on migration, masculinity, and temporality, with waiting as the central analytical lens.

The overall research question is as follows: *How does the experience of uncertainty and waiting shape the masculine identities of male migrants from non-European countries in Lisbon?*

1.1 Thesis structure

This thesis opens with an overview of immigration policies in Portugal towards non-European nationals since 2007, in an attempt to better understand the legal and institutional context for the participants in this research. This policy context proves relevant to the analysis and aims at supporting the empirical data, particularly in relation to the waiting periods migrants encounter when seeking residency and family reunification. It is not an absolute overview of the policies, but cover the basis of what appeared in the accounts of the fieldwork.

The following chapter presents the State of the Art and the theoretical framework. The state of the art aims at situating this thesis within the existing scholarship on migration studies, as it engages with literature on migration research and transnational migration. The theoretical framework will further introduce masculinity, temporality and waiting, intersectionality and liminality. By using these concepts, the thesis aims at creating a better understanding of the migration experience of male migrants, which will be explored when analyzing the empirical data. The methodological chapter will outline how the research was designed and conducted,

introducing the field site, the participants, and the ethnographic methods used to conduct the research. It will also introduce my own reflections, as well as the limitations and ethical considerations.

The analysis chapter presents a thematic analysis of the empirical data collected through nine months of ethnographic fieldwork in Lisbon. The first section examines waiting as a structurally produced condition, exploring how the Portuguese immigration system and migration infrastructure creates uncertainty in the lives of the participants. The second section draws on the concept of liminality to examine what this suspension feels like, by exploring the in-between condition that waiting produces. The third section brings the analysis across borders, examining how waiting strains and affects the transnational ties and family obligations that connect the participants to their home countries. Finally, the fourth section of the analysis shows how the conditions of waiting, liminality, and transnational pressure, affect masculine identity, as they disrupt the provider roles that motivated the migration to begin with. Rather than treating these as separate topics, the thesis combines them, to show how they build on each other. Male migrants in Portugal navigate an intersectional identity under constant pressure, while maintaining transnational family ties and provider roles, and at the same time confronting the instability and suspension produced by uncertainty and waiting. Migration, as this thesis will argue, is a masculine space, and understanding it as such opens up dimensions of the experience that are too often left unexamined.

Finally, the thesis will conclude by drawing together its findings and returning to the central argument: that migration is not a genderless phenomenon, and therefore cannot be understood as a genderless experience. The analysis will show that masculinity both shapes the decision to migrate, and continues to be renegotiated throughout the migration process.

1.2 Immigration Policies in Portugal

This section will introduce a brief overview of the immigration policies governing non-European nationals. It is worth noting that the thesis does not claim legal expertise in Portuguese immigration law, nor does it attempt a comprehensive analysis of the regulatory framework for 'third-country nationals' (which in this thesis is referred to as *non-European nationals*). Rather, the overview presented here aims to establish the policy context affecting the participants' experience, and to show how the context has changed in relation to the

accounts of the participants. Drawing on Fassin's (2011) work of migration governmentality, this thesis argues that policies do not simply regulate migration, but also produce waiting as a structural condition, which is exactly what the participants experience.

The policies for non-European nationals in Portugal is primarily regulated by Law no. 23/2007, which was established in alignment with EU regulations and sets out the rules governing visa applications and the eligibility criteria for different types of permits and residency statuses. As this thesis focuses specifically on migrants from outside the EU, the following overview concentrates on the regulations regarding non-European nationals. Law no. 23/2007 provides for several categories of legal stay, including tourist visas, short-stay permits, and temporary residence permits (TRC). This thesis is concerned primarily with the TRC and permanent residency, rather than short-stay arrangements, as it reflects the fact that permanent residency is typically the long-term goal for migrants settling in Portugal.

There are several grounds on which a non-European national may obtain a residence visa, which is the first step toward a TRC. The purpose of the residence visa is to allow entry into Portuguese territory in order to subsequently apply for a residence permit (Law no. 23/2007, Art. 40). Under Article 52, non-European nationals are eligible for a residence visa if they hold a written employment contract or a job offer (Law no. 23/2007, Art. 52). Article 60 extends eligibility to those who have made investments in Portugal or who can demonstrate sufficient financial means and an intention to continue investing in the country (Law no. 23/2007, Art. 60). Article 64 further provides for residence visas on the grounds of family reunification (Law no. 23/2007, Art. 64). With regard to processing times, Article 58 establishes that decisions on residence visa applications should be issued within 60 days, while decisions on family reunification cases may take up to three months (Law no. 23/2007, Art. 58, 71).

Once a residence visa has been granted, the TRC issued on that basis is initially valid for one year and may subsequently be renewed for two-year periods (Law no. 23/2007, Art. 52). Among the conditions required to obtain a TRC, is the holding of a valid residence visa (Law no. 23/2007, Art. 53–54). To progress to permanent residency, a migrant must have held a TRC for a minimum of five years (Law no. 23/2007, Art. 56). Permanent residency carries no expiration date but must be renewed every five years (Law no. 23/2007, Art. 53). For many migrants, these pathways created expectations that shaped their decisions to come to Portugal in the first place.

1.2.1 Bureaucratic Changes: From SEF to AIMA

Law no. 23/2007 has undergone multiple revisions since its establishment (Diário da República, 2007). In 2012, SEF introduced the 'Golden Visa' (Autorização de Residência para Atividade de Investimento, or ARI), a residence permit based on investment activity, as a part of a broader amendment to immigration policies originally established under Law No. 23/2007. The Golden Visa would grant residency for non-European nationals who had made qualifying investments in Portugal, particularly through the purchase of property. This established an attractive route and became a popular way to obtain Portuguese residency for non-European nationals. In October 2023 however, the Portuguese government passed the Mais Habitação housing law, which abolished the real estate investment route, which removed residential and commercial property purchases as qualifying investment options for new applicants (Lei No. 56/2023). Applicants who had already begun their application under the old rules were however still protected through their investments, meaning they could continue and renew their applications under the previous framework. During this period, mechanisms like the manifestation of interest enabled migrants already present in Portugal to regularize their status without needing a prior entry visa. This created to expectations of accessible legalization which were ultimately disappointed when this pathway was abolished in 2024 (Decreto-Lei n.º 37-A/2024).

Additionally, from 2023 onwards, institutional restructuring and policy changes have significantly altered and changed this landscape. The end of the Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras (SEF) and the start of the Agência para a Integração, Migrações e Asilo (AIMA) have led to more administrative delays and increased restrictions on regularization options that were previously accessible (OECD 2024, 224; ECRE, 2023). Because of this, migrants often face longer waiting periods, in some cases over several years, before they can obtain residence permits, temporary residence cards, or access to family reunification (OECD 2024, 224). This gap between formal legal rights and practical access creates ongoing uncertainty, leaving migrants in a state between legal and social limbo. For male migrants in particular, these longer periods of waiting can strongly affect their expectations, responsibilities, and experiences of masculinity, especially in relation to work, economic provision, and transnational family roles. It is this intersection of administrative waiting and masculine identity that the empirical chapters of this thesis seek to examine.

1.2.2 Political Climate and Legal Uncertainty

The political atmosphere surrounding the 2025 elections made migrants in this study feel even more uncertain. Several participants shared concerns about the rise of far-right parties and what their potential influence on immigration policy might mean for them, and their future in Portugal. Rumors circulated among migrants at the organization about increasingly restriction regarding residence permits and other regulations, adding a layer of uncertainty around the bureaucratic policies they were already navigating. These rumors were not grounded in actual legal knowledge, but in a shared anxiety and uncertainty about what the political situation and direction of the country might mean for people in their position.

2 Theoretical Framework and State of the Art

The following chapter will combine the State of the Art and theoretical framework, by first introducing literature on migration research, to situate the thesis. Further, the theoretical framework chapter introduces the concepts and lenses that will form the analytical foundation of the thesis. A growing body of scholarship has examined the intersections of masculinity, migration, and temporality. However, research focusing on how administrative waiting reshapes masculine identities among non-European male migrants in Southern European contexts, such as Portugal, remains limited. This thesis focuses on the gendered and temporal dimensions of migration in Portugal, and how the experience of waiting shapes the masculine identities of the men who navigate it.

While the State of the Art aims at situating this thesis' research within already ongoing scholarly debates within migration research, the theoretical framework chapter will focus specifically on the concepts that will be applied in the analysis of the empirical data.

2.1 State of the Art: Migration Research

Migration as a phenomenon has been developing over decades, and created its own field of research. It affects not only the people who migrate, but also their families left behind, the country they leave, as well as the country they migrate to. Migration can be examined from multiple perspectives, including legal status, integration or labor market participation. This

section introduces key debates and approaches within migration studies, such as migration infrastructure, transnationalism, and governance.

2.1.1 Migration Infrastructure

An important contribution to the development of migration research, is the concept of migration infrastructure. As Xiang and Lindquist (2014) introduce the concept with their research on migration in China, it shows how the conditions of migration can shift over time. Up until the early 2000s, only "state-owned enterprise employees with governmental permission could work overseas legally" (Xiang and Lindquist 2014, 123), meaning that migration was tightly controlled and accessible to fer. Since then, the conditions have changed, opening up international labor migration to an entire population (Xiang and Lindquist 2014, 123). They introduce the concept of "migration infrastructure" within migration studies, to show how migration is not only about the migrants, but about the whole system which includes both actors, institutions, technologies (Xiang and Lindquist 2014, 124). Xiang and Lindquist introduce five dimensions of migration infrastructure that together shape how migration unfolds: the commercial, including recruitment intermediaries; the regulatory, covering state apparatus and procedures for documentation and licensing; the technological, meaning communication and transport; the humanitarian, such as NGOs and international organizations; and the social, referring to migrant networks (2014, 124). The development within migration infrastructure and policies in China, has opened up the world for and increased the possibility of migration within the population. According to Xiang and Lindquist, the dimensions of infrastructure, consisting if the different actors and facilitators, both collide and contradict each other. As Xiang and Lindquist argue, it is not people who migrate, but networks (2014, 133), and it is this deep entanglement that is key to understanding migration infrastructure (2014, 124).

Xiang and Lindquist (2014) introduce a new way of looking at migration as an infrastructural network between different actors, such as through recruitment agencies, training centers and brokers, here with the example of Chinese and Indonesian migrants. The recruitment agencies provide various documentation, training, and control mobility of migrant workers, from transit to arrival, as well as upon return (Xiang and Lindquist 2014, 133). Further, they include an example of the economic gain these actors have within migration infrastructure, and how even

though the migration is safer and freer, it has also become harder and exploitative (Xiang and Lindquist 2014, 126, 133).

Connecting this literature on migration infrastructure, Zuntz' work (2023) introduces 'human routers', providing a different and valuable version of migration infrastructure. While Xiang and Lindquist (2014) focus on the legal migration infrastructure within China and its governmental policies, Zuntz (2023) introduces a more informal version, through informal actors through kinship and connections. Her work shows how Syrian refugees in the UK use social contacts to navigate their journey from the sending country to the host country, and how these contacts function as 'human routers', functioning similarly to a network modem (Zuntz 2023, 520).

Just as the network modem transfers signals and provides service, people can work in the same way (Zuntz 2023, 520). These human routers function within all parts of the migration process, facilitating and supporting through the social connections migrants often have through kinship from their home country (Zuntz 2023, 527). Migration infrastructure can be explained as an 'ecosystem' of brokers who continue to facilitate departure, in transit, and upon arrival (Zuntz 2023, 520), and how they in this specific research help Syrian refugees to navigate all parts of the migration journey. The brokers work with facilitating passports, with the transportation within, and in-between countries, provide work in the host country, and even function as banks (Zuntz 2023, 520, 527). This shows the importance of connections, specifically connections from one's home country, is within migration. This is relevant to the participants in this thesis, whose migration journeys were also shaped by networks of trust, kinship, and connection.

2.1.2 Transnational Migration

Within migration studies, the concept of transnational migration has emerged as a valuable framework for understanding migration and migrant lives. The concept developed as a critical response to earlier models, which assumed that people who moved would eventually assimilate and leave their home countries behind, by letting go of their customs, religion, identities, and social ties that had defined their previous lives (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, 1002). Transnationalism in contrast argue that migration needs to be understood as a process extending beyond and across national borders (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992, ix; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, 1002). Rather than moving from one country to another and leaving their lives behind, transnational migrants live across borders, sustaining familial, economic,

social, organizational, religious, and political ties that span their home country and their host country (Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992, ix).

Transnational migration draws attention to a duality at the center of the migrant experience, particularly the relationship between "ways of being and ways of belonging" (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, 1002, 1010). Ways of being refers to actual social relations and practices individuals engage in, while ways of belonging constitute a conscious connection to a particular group, demonstrated through acts of membership such as maintaining cultural and religious practices or ties to one's homeland through everyday practices (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, 1010). A migrant may engage in transnational practices, their ways of being, without necessarily feeling a strong sense of belonging to either their home or host country, or may feel a deep sense of belonging to a place they can no longer physically inhabit. We can see this within the accounts of the migrants in this research, who navigate daily life while maintaining strong emotional, economic and familial ties to their home countries.

Central to this framework is the recognition that transnational migrants are not passive participants in this process. As Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton put it, transmigrants act, decide, and maintain concerns within a field of social relations connecting their country of origin to their country or countries of settlement (1992, ix). This includes the range of ties such as familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political, that migrants sustain across borders (Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992, ix). Importantly, the transnational perspective stresses that assimilation and enduring ties to the home country are neither incompatible nor mutually exclusive (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, 1002). Understanding migration therefore requires attending to the transnational relationships that continue to shape migrant lives.

The transnational framework has also been developed to address the specifically gendered dimensions of migration. Scholars have increasingly highlighted a paradox within migration research: male migrants have historically made up a larger proportion of migration flows, yet their gendered experiences have remained surprisingly underexamined. As Wojnicka (2019, 283) argues, migrant men are simultaneously over-researched as the assumed normative migrant subject, and yet been persistently understudied because their experiences tend to be universalized rather than examined their diversity. The result is a tendency to treat male migration as a homogenous group of migrants, rather than looking at the significant differences

between individuals and groups of migrant men, shaped by their legal status, class, ethnicity, religion, and cultural background (Wojnicka 2019, 283-284). There is also a significant difference, for example, between the social and legal position of an "expat", and a refugee; both are migrants, but their resources, recognition, legal access and opportunities differ substantially (Wojnicka 2019, 286).

It is also worth noting how migrant men are frequently represented in broader public and political discourse. Wojnicka (2019, 286), drawing on Scheibelhofer and Spindler, describes the concept of 'foreign masculinity', through which migrant men are presented as culturally different, problematic or dangerous. This thesis rejects this framing, and instead examines migrant masculinities in their own terms, attending to their diversity and situatedness of men's lived experiences. It is precisely this gap in the literature this thesis seeks to address.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The state of the art has situated the thesis within broader scholarly debates on migration, showing how migration is shaped by infrastructural networks, transnational ties, and the simultaneity of belonging across borders. This section builds on that foundation by introducing the specific theoretical concepts that will be applied to the analysis of the empirical data. While the state of the art reviewed the field broadly, the theoretical framework focuses on the analytical tools needed to examine what the empirical data actually shows: how waiting shapes the masculine identities of male migrants in Lisbon.

These concepts did not emerge from literature alone, as mentioned, but developed organically through the research process itself. Throughout conversations with the participants and other members of the organization where the fieldwork was conducted, certain themes came increasingly to the surface. The following sections introduce four interconnected concepts; hegemonic masculinity provides the lens for understanding what these men expected of themselves and why waiting and uncertainty reshapes their sense of self. Temporality explains how waiting is not accidental, but structurally produced through institutional and political mechanisms. Liminality captures the in-between condition that the waiting has produced, where they find themselves in between social worlds. Intersectionality shows why the experience of waiting is not the same for everyone, but how each participant's experience is

shaped by their different identity markers, such as class, legal status, and cultural background. Together these concepts allow the analysis to show the complexity of what the participants have described, and to show how waiting is gendered and a structurally produced condition.

2.2.1 Masculinity

Masculinity is not a fixed or universally agreed upon concept. What it means to be a man, and how masculinity is performed and understood, has been central of ongoing academic debate across disciplines. Masculinity has often been defined in relation to femininity and feminine traits, with stereotypical associations around traits such as *strength*, *control*, and *emotional* restraint, while femininity in contrast defined as *softness*, *weakness*, and *emotionality* (Reeser 2010, 1). These binary framings have however been widely challenged.

Reeser (2010) argues that masculinity is not just a single unified concept, but rather something that different men interpret and enact in different ways, shaped by their social positioning, including their occupation, appearance, nationality, and manner of self-expression (3). Rather than attempting to define masculinity in fixed terms, this thesis situates itself within these debates and treats the diversity of masculine identities as analytically significant. This matters particularly in migration contexts, where men arrive from different countries, cultures and social backgrounds, each carrying different understandings of what it means to be a man. The following section introduces hegemonic masculinity as the specific theoretical framework that this thesis will use to examine how masculine identities are constructed, challenged, and renegotiated under conditions of waiting.

2.2.2 Hegemonic Masculinity

The concept of hegemonic masculinity provides the foundational framework for understanding masculinity as it is examined in this thesis. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the dominant cultural ideal of masculinity in which men are measured at any given time and place (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832). It is relational, defined not only in opposition to femininity, but also in relation to subordinated and marginalized forms of masculinity, and it is historically variable, meaning that what counts as hegemonic shifts across different cultural, institutional, and geographical contexts (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832-836). Connell and Messerschmidt stresses that hegemonic masculinity is not a permanent structure, as it can

change over time, in a future with a potentially less notable male dominance and gender hierarchy (2005, 832-833, 847-848).

At the top of the hierarchy sits hegemonic masculinity, the form most valued and rewarded in a particular context, while other masculinities are positioned as complicit, subordinate, or marginalized, compared to it (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832). Complicit masculinities are those that benefit from the rewards of hegemony without fully embodying its ideals, while marginalized masculinities are those pushed to the outside of the hierarchy, often through intersecting structures of race, class, and legal status (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832; Howson and Hearn 2019, 45).

Hegemonic masculinity is not just imposed from above. Instead, it is actively shaped and maintained through everyday practices and social interactions (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 835). Men do not passively inhabit masculine ideals but negotiate, perform, and sometimes resist them depending on the social contexts they move through (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832, 836, Reeser 2010, 3). Reeser similarly points out that masculinity is not one fixed thing. It changes depending on factors such as occupation, nationality, and cultural background, meaning that there is no single definition of masculinity that covers all the ways men experience and express masculinity (2010, 3).

In the context of migration specifically, hegemonic masculine ideals are frequently organized around the figure of the provider, the man who works, earns, and supports his family, and migration is often undertaken precisely as a means of fulfilling this role (Donaldson and Howson 2009, 210). Migration can therefore be understood as a masculine project in itself, driven by and evaluated against hegemonic expectations, functioning as both a rite of passage and a means of achieving masculine status and recognition (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, 1017; Donaldson and Howson 2009, 210; Wojnicka 2019, 284; Gallo and Scrinzi 2016, 8). Gallo and Scrinzi (2016) extend this analysis by showing how migration produces deep transformations in how gendered family relations are lived and imagined across transnational spaces, and how the emotional ties connecting migrants to their families and wider social networks are inseparable from masculine identities and expectations (205). At the same time, the migration process can challenge or undermine these very expectations, placing men in conditions where the ideals they are measured against become difficult or impossible to fulfill. It is this relationship between masculine expectation and structural constraint that runs through

the analysis of this thesis, with hegemonic masculinity serving as the primary lens through which the experiences of the participants are examined.

2.2.3 Temporality, Waiting and Governance

Migration is not only a spatial process, but it is also a deeply temporal one. For many migrants, particularly those coming from outside the EU, the experience of migration is defined not only by movement across borders, but by periods of waiting, uncertainty, and administrative suspension. This section introduces temporality as an analytical concept and examines how waiting functions not only as a bureaucratic byproduct, but as an active mechanism of migration control, producing a condition that the analysis will examine through the empirical data.

The concept of temporal dispossession, as developed by Isaac (2022) in her research on asylum seekers in Sweden, offers a significant analytical framework. Isaac argues that the temporality of asylum processes can itself serve as a deliberate policy of deterrence. By positioning time and timing as central elements of migration governance, states make the asylum system increasingly hostile and difficult to navigate (Isaac 2022, 945–946). In Sweden, the introduction of temporary residency permits restructured the temporal landscape of asylum, reflecting a broader trend across Europe toward the securitization of migration and more restrictive border regimes (Isaac 2022, 946). Drawing on Hage (2009), Isaac further observes that bureaucratic power not only determines what migrants are waiting for, but also produces the waiting itself (Isaac 2022, 947). The temporary legislation was made permanent in 2021, institutionalizing these temporal dynamics within the Swedish asylum system (Isaac 2022, 947).

A similar pattern can be found in Whyte, Campbell, and Overgaard (2020) research on asylum camps in Denmark. Here, the deliberate use of temporary tent camps was meant to deter asylum seekers by creating an unwelcoming environment, making Denmark seem less attractive (Whyte, Campbell, and Overgaard (2020, 143–144). These camps were not just symbolically hostile; they also created real dangers, such as fire risks from poor construction and inadequate fencing that threatened residents' safety and privacy (Whyte, Campbell, and Overgaard (2020, 144). Whyte, Campbell, and Overgaard describe this setup as a ‘successful failure’, meaning that policy works as a deterrent because of its obvious shortcomings (2020, 144).

These cases can be situated within a broader framework of immigration governmentality, as developed by Fassin (2011). Fassin argues that immigration must be understood in relation to how states manage and control populations through institutional power (2011, 213–214). He draws a distinction between borders and boundaries: borders denote the territorial and political limits of the state, while boundaries refer to the social and symbolic divisions, such as race, ethnicity, and belonging, that migrants encounter within those borders (Fassin 2011, 214). Migrants cross borders, Fassin argues, but they experience boundaries (2011, 215). Together, these produce conditions of otherness and migrant illegality through biopolitical mechanisms of governance (Fassin 2011, 214–217). Crucially, migration governance operates not only through spatial control but also through temporal mechanisms, such as delay, uncertainty, and the administrative processes that keep migrants in a state of suspension (Fassin 2011, 214, 217-218).

This temporal dimension is examined by Andersson (2014), who argues that time has become a multifaceted instrument, even a weapon, in states' responses to unauthorized migration (2014, 795–796). The time delays built into migratory experiences are not incidental, but structural, reflecting a deliberate political economy of waiting (Andersson 2014, 796). Drawing on Foucault, Agamben, and Fassin, Andersson (2014, 796) develops the concept of biopolitical border control to capture how waiting, insecurity, and refusal have come to define the border experience for those who lack the economic, social, and cultural capital associated with ‘flexible citizenship’ (Ong 1999, cited in Andersson 2014, 796). The question Andersson poses, whether waiting is merely a bureaucratic byproduct or a deliberate management technique, runs through much of the literature on irregular migration (Andersson 2014, 796).

Finally, the experience of waiting is not only a feature of asylum systems, but also of family migration. Gallo and Scrinzi (2016) introduce ‘waiting husbands’ to describe migrant men whose families remain in their country of origin while they navigate the migration process abroad (2016, 207–210). This waiting carries its own gendered dimensions, shaping how men experience and perform their roles as providers and fathers across transnational distances. The hardship of this waiting period is therefore central to this thesis's examination of masculinity and transnational family life.

Waiting, as it is understood in this thesis, is not only about time passing by. It is a condition of being unable to move forward, due to legal processes, constraints and delays, that are outside of the migrants' control. When I asked the participants whether they knew when their waiting would end, none of them could answer. They had arrived in Portugal without knowing how long the process would take. What made waiting so difficult was not only how long it lasted, but the fact that no one could tell them when it would stop.

2.2.4 Intersectionality

Intersectionality provides a useful lens to better understand the male migrant experience. Originally developed by Crenshaw (1989; 1991), intersectionality describes how overlapping systems of oppression shaped the experiences of black women, but has since been applied more broadly to understand how multiple identity categories interact with each other, and produce different social positions and experiences (Davis 2014, 17). These identities can be regarding class, legal status, religion, ethnicity, gender and age, and show how these interact and shape the positions people occupy (Crenshaw 1991, cited by Davis 2014, 17). Since the theory originated, it has become one of the most influential and applied frameworks within feminist and social science scholars, because of its capacity to capture the complexity of social life in ways a more singular analytical lens cannot (Davis 2008, 77). She suggests that the concepts' very openness has been central to its success as a feminist theory, allowing it to be used across different empirical and disciplinary contexts without losing its critical edge (Davis 2008, 77)

Within migration studies, intersectionality is adopted as a framework to understand the diversity of migrant experiences. It shows how overlapping inequalities of gender, class, race and ethnicity, shape who migrates, how they migrate, and what they encounter upon arrival (Bastia 2014, 237-238; Wojnicka 2019, 283-285). The framework connects to Connells's hegemonic masculinity, as it already recognizes that the construction of masculinity cannot be reduced to gender alone, but is constituted through other social markers, including race, class and citizenship. A man's position within the masculine hierarchy is shaped not only by his gender, but by the intersection of these different positions and identity markers they hold (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832). Intersectionality, as developed by Crenshaw, makes these dimensions analytically explicit, and provides the tools to examine how they interact in the lives of individuals (Davis 2008, 67-68). The men in this study are all male migrants from non-European countries waiting in Portugal, but their experiences of waiting are shaped by

different intersecting positions. Their class backgrounds, legal routes to Portugal, employment situations, nationality, cultural expectations and transnational family obligations all combine to produce distinct experiences that cannot be understood through gender alone. Additionally, within the specific gender, male migrants cannot be treated as a homogenous group precisely because these intersecting markers of identity produce different experiences and positions (Wojnicka 2019, 283).

Building on Crenshaw's foundational work, Yuval-Davis (2015) develops the concept of situated intersectionality, which argues that inequalities are not only multiple and overlapping, but are always experienced from a specific social location (Yuval-Davis 2015, 91). In other words, the same categories of race, class, and gender will produce different experiences depending on where a person is situated socially (Yuval-Davis 2015, 91).

This is relevant to this thesis as it connects intersectionality to the concept of situated knowledge which will be further introduced in the methodology chapter. Together, they reinforce the argument that the experiences of the men in this research are not universal or generalizable, but are shaped by the very specific position they occupy as male migrants navigating legal uncertainty and waiting in Portugal. Wojnicka (2019) similarly emphasize that an intersectional approach is necessary to move beyond the universalization of male migrant experience, which has historically ignored important differences between groups. Intersectionality in this thesis is therefore understood not as a fixed checklist of identity categories, but as a dynamic analytical lens that draws attention to how different dimensions of identity interact and shift across different social contexts and over time.

2.2.5 Liminality

While liminality as a concept originated in the study of rituals, it has since been widely applied into migration and refugee studies to capture the suspended, uncertain, and in-between position that the migrant experience captures (Malkki 1995a; Malkki 1995b; Tsoni 2016). Malkki's work on Burundian refugees in Tanzania introduces the concept of liminality in relation to displacement and territory, arguing that refugees and forced migrants exist in a social position that sits both within, and outside, of the 'national order of things', meaning the taken-for-granted assumption that people belong to and are defined by a specific national territory (Malkki 1995a, 6-7; Malkki 1995b, 495-496). In this condition, migrants find themselves no

longer classified within one social and national order, but not yet classified within another, producing a state of being in between (Malkki 1995a, 7).

This liminal position is not only spatially experienced, but temporally, as it is a condition of waiting to belong. Building on this, Tsoni (2016) introduces the concept of liminality specifically to migration in Lesvos, Greece. Her description of refugees who are not let in to Greece, not allowed to stay, and not allowed to leave (Tsoni 2016, 39), captures something that the participants in this thesis describe in the uncertainty and waiting they experience. They are unable to fully settle in Portugal, unable to return home without loss and a 'failed' migration attempt, and unable to move forward with their lives they are waiting to start in Portugal. The liminality the participants in this thesis experience is not a rite of passage with a clear end point, but a structural condition produced by bureaucratic delay, legal uncertainty, and social and legal exclusion, in which they do not know when will find its end.

Migrants in this condition find themselves in a liminal state, suspended between the social world they have left, and the one they are attempting to enter, without a clear or guaranteed way of to navigate between the two. By connecting this to temporality and waiting, we can see how the liminal state too is temporal, and defined by waiting for a transition that has not yet arrived. It also connects to the intersection of their legal status, class background, and cultural position, as the thesis will continue to argue. In this thesis, liminality will be used to examine the experience of the in-between condition that participants describe, and to explore how this suspension affects their masculine identity and sense of self.

2.2.6 Connecting the Framework

These concepts do not operate independently, but form an interconnected analytical framework. In this thesis, liminality will be used to examine the in-between condition that participants describe and to explore how this suspension shapes their masculine identity and sense of self. Liminality does not operate in isolation from the other concepts introduced in this framework. It is produced by the temporal mechanisms of waiting, intensified by the transnational obligations that make suspension so costly, and experienced differently by each participant depending on the intersecting dimensions of their class, legal status, and cultural

background. These concepts build on each other rather functioning separately. Together these concepts form the analytical lens through which the empirical material will be examined.

3 Methodology

This chapter will present the design, implementation, and analytical structure of the research. The methodological approach is guided by a focused selection of literature, primarily methodological handbooks and textbooks within social sciences. Central references include Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007) work on ethnographic principles, and Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) on qualitative interviewing. Haraway's (1988) concept of situated knowledge, originating from feminist science studies, provides the epistemological foundation reflecting on researcher positioning, and situating this thesis within a tradition of reflexive and embodied knowledge production. This chapter introduces the field site and research context, details on the methodological choices, incorporates personal reflections, and addresses ethical considerations and limitations that have shaped the research process, and the material produced.

3.1 Research Context and the Organization as a Field site

The fieldwork for this thesis has been conducted in Lisbon, Portugal, over the course of nine months. I initially came to Portugal for an internship at a local non-governmental organization (NGO). The NGO works with migrants and refugees with a focus on integration and empowerment, and offers resources to migrants and refugees, including language courses, job support, free meals, and social integration activities. Throughout this thesis the organization will be referred to as "the organization" or "the NGO" rather than by its name, to avoid identifying any of the participants. While the organization provided an invaluable field site and played a central role in facilitating access to the participants, I observed certain religious and value-based dimensions of its work that I found ethically challenging. Rather than drawing attention to the organization by name in a way that might be perceived as critical, and to protect both the organization and anonymity of participants who depend on its services, I have chosen to keep it anonymous throughout the thesis.

The organization provides, as mentioned, a wide range of resources for migrants in Lisbon. It has welcomed thousands of members from different countries, especially non-European

nationals, with a visibly higher proportion of male members. During my internship, my responsibilities primarily focused on supporting interns and staff rather than directly serving migrants. However, I participated in weekly dinners for members and attended cultural events such as Christmas celebrations, a Pakistani evening, and a Women's Day dinner, among others. My involvement in these activities was voluntary and initiated independently, outside of my formal role. I also attended Portuguese language courses, learning alongside the very people the organization aims to support. After completing my internship, I continued to volunteer with a group dedicated to providing activities and support specifically for migrant women, continuing my connection and participation at the organization.

From the beginning of my time at the NGO, I was interested in making direct contact with the people using its services, with the aim of gaining deeper insight into the lived experience of migration, and the ways in which migrants navigate life in a host country. The relationships I developed over my time at the organization has formed the foundation for the interviews and observations that constitute the empirical material of this thesis. In this sense, the organization has worked as a sort of 'gate keeper', and helped facilitate the initial contact with the people in question, and creating the conditions for trust to develop over time (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 4).

3.1.1 The Organization as a Masculine Space

Over the course of my fieldwork, it became increasingly clear that the organization not only function as a space for support, but also a social space. However, this space was deeply gendered, as the male members were more visible and more present in the shared areas of the building, gathering in the common room playing pool, attending the weekly dinners, and occupying the spaces. Female members, as mentioned, were less visible as they did not use the space in the same way as the men. Rather than lingering in the shared spaces, the women tended to use the organization's services more quietly and in more bounded ways, such as attending to embroidery workshops and other specific activities, which usually were held in the basement area of the building.

This dynamic had consequences that extended beyond observation. On one occasion, a woman called me on WhatsApp in distress about a personal matter involving her partner. When I

suggested meeting at the organization, she declined, saying that her partner and his friends were there, and she did not want them to see her upset. She did not have another place to go, and we ended up meeting in a park in Lisbon. This small but revealing moment shows something important about how the organization's shared spaces function in practice. While it is formally open to anyone, it has become socially claimed by male members in ways that might make them feel inaccessible or unsafe for some of the female members.

The organization function as a resource, but it is not a neutral one. It reproduces through its everyday social geography, some of the same gendered dynamics that structured the broader migrant experience it was designed to support. This observation is relevant to my research in two ways. It helps explain the demographic of my empirical data towards male participants, as the men I interviewed and observed were visible and present in the space where the fieldwork took place. It also raises a broader question about the gendered dimensions of migration support infrastructure, one that this thesis cannot answer, but acknowledges. The organization provides a community, activities, meals, language courses, and emotional and legal support. For the men in this research, it also provides something less formal, but important, namely a social world where they belong, and a space to maintain a sense of masculine identity and social presence. That same space might function in a different way for the migrant women, but this perspective and experience remains outside of the scope of this thesis. As the research is based off five participants, the following section will introduce them and their stories.

3.1.2 The Participants

Raj:

I first met Raj, an Indian man in his late thirties, at the very beginning of my internship at the organization. He was sociable and knew everyone at there, both the members and the staff. At the time he was working for an Indian IT-company in Lisbon, commuting to the office every day, and spending his evenings at the gym before coming to the NGO. I soon learnt that he had previously volunteered there, wanting to give back to the community that had supported him during difficult periods of his life.

Raj had come to Portugal around six years earlier. He initially traveled with his wife and son, but they returned to India shortly after his arrival. With the assistance of an Indian travel agency, he found a place to stay in Lisbon, and has lived with an Indian family ever since. He

has lived in Lisbon for six years with his wife and son still in India, waiting for a family reunification process that has yet to be resolved. I would see Raj often at the organization, usually in a good spirit and eager to talk. After a few months, however, he had lost his job due to company bankruptcy, and his visits to the organization became more frequent. He would come to use the computer available to members, applying for jobs and preparing for interviews, but also simply to have somewhere to go during the day. Over time I started to notice a gradual shift in his energy. He began sharing more about the stress and sadness of unemployment, and about how much he missed his family in India.

We spent a lot of time together at the organization, over coffee breaks in the office, or tea at the bodega on the corner of the street, and I would often find him on video calls with his mother, wife, and son, whom I also met through these conversations. His openness and willingness to share his experience gradually led me to ask whether he would be willing to participate in a formal interview for this research, in which he followed up on by contacting me on LinkedIn.

Omar, Tariq and Mohammed:

After several months at the organization, I had been in contact with so many of the members through regular attendance at the weekly community dinners held every Wednesday. At one of these dinners, deliberately choosing to sit at a table with people I had not yet met, I was introduced to three brothers from Pakistan: Omar, Tariq and Mohammed. They explained how they came to the organization partly for the community, and partly because they missed speaking English, a language they spoke fluently having gone to private schools growing up, and from years of working in hospitality and hotels back in Pakistan. The brothers, who were in their early to late forties, were open and easy to talk to from the first time we met. They spoke freely about their lives in Pakistan and their transition to Portugal. They had left Pakistan about four years earlier due to political instability, resigning from their jobs and bringing their savings with them, though they still owned property and land back home that they had been unable to sell.

When they moved to Lisbon, they brought their mother and sister with them, and were able to make the move due to a financial investment providing them with a Commonwealth Passport of Dominica. The whole family has lived together in the same rented apartment in Lisbon ever since. They told me about a Pakistani friend already living in Lisbon, who helped them find housing and locate the premises for a shop, which they needed in order to obtain a residence

permit through investment in Portugal. Their relationship with their friend, however, quickly turned damaging, as they told me how their friend had deliberately mistranslated documents, and used their money in their name without authorization. Due to the exploitation they experienced, the brothers were eventually forced to declare bankruptcy and close the shop shortly after opening, leaving them with debts they continue to pay to this day.

Wei:

At the same community dinner where I met the brothers, I also met Wei, a Chinese man in his mid-thirties. He had moved to Portugal three years earlier, and had purchased an apartment with two bedrooms making investments which would grant him residency, and was renting out one of the rooms. When we first spoke, he mentioned that he usually only came to the organization for the Wednesday dinners, and that he was primarily interested in meeting people from Northern Europe and Scandinavia. I had come to the dinner with a friend from the Netherlands, and reflecting on it now, our appearance likely contributed to his initial interest in speaking with us. Compared to the brothers, Wei seemed more guarded and less willing to share openly, though he joined the conversation at the table.

However, as I was planning to meet with the brothers for an interview, Wei volunteered as well to participate. When we met the following week at the organization, he explained that Portugal had never been his intended destination, but that he had always wanted to move to Northern Europe. However, as Portugal presented a more accessible route to residency in Europe, he decided that Portugal would be his ticket in, and eventually would be able to move to Northern Europe. Portugal, as he explained, was always meant to be an entry-way to Europe, rather than a home.

Wei' expressed a strong sense of distrust of other migrants, describing them in general terms as dishonest and untrustworthy. He was also distrustful of other Chinese migrants in Lisbon, as well as in China, whom he described as politically conditioned and unable to think independently as a result of Chinese state propaganda. This distrust extended to a broader distrust and wariness of the Chinese government itself, which he believed monitored Chinese citizens abroad. For this reason, Wei uses a false name and was unwilling to be recorded on any device other than his own phone, and did not consent to the use of online transcription tools.

At the end of my interview with Wei, I asked him why he agreed to participate in an interview with me, as I was curious due to his concern of safety. His response touched on themes of gender and attraction rather than a straightforward interest in the research itself, which I addressed directly and professionally, and made it clear that this was not an interview with exchanges. This interaction has continued to further reflections in how my own positioning as a young woman researcher shaped the dynamics of certain fieldwork relationships, which will be further discussed in the situated knowledge section.

3.2 Ethnographic Fieldwork

Ethnographic fieldwork provides a valuable framework for exploring social life as it unfolds in everyday contexts. As Hammersley and Atkinson argue, ethnographic fieldwork involves participating in people's daily lives over an extended period, observing interactions, engaging in conversations, and collecting diverse forms of data in order to understand social practices and meanings (2007, 3). Through my internship at the organization, I spent my days in the same room as the participants, in the same language classes, through an extended period of time. The time I spent with migrants at the organization contributed significantly to the data collection. Through spontaneous conversations by the coffee station, or sharing dinner, I have built my relationships with the participants, allowing me to participate in their lives, and not only observe from a distance. Rather than retrieving quantitative data based on numbers, qualitative research and interviews work with words, and interviews provide a valuable insight into the life world of the interviewee (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 30-32). Qualitative research is concerned with the everyday, cultural, and situated dimensions of human experience, and is distinguished from more technical approaches to study human lives (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 12).

McCall (2006) similarly emphasizes that ethnographic fieldwork enables the researcher to gain insight into the symbolic worlds and lived realities of participants through sustained engagement in the field (3-4). In this sense, the extended duration of fieldwork allows for the development of contextual knowledge and a deeper understanding of participants' experiences (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 3). Over nine months, I developed a detailed and contextual understanding of the participants' lives, including their daily routines, struggles, family situations, and migration experiences. The empirical material of this thesis is based on both formal and informal methods. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore specific

themes related to migration, while still allowing flexibility for participants to articulate their own perspectives from their life worlds, while allowing me to, as Kvale and Brinkmann describe, interpret the meaning of the described phenomena (2009, 3). Before conducting the interviews, I created a set of questions and themes I wanted to explore, however, as the conversations went on, other topics arose as well. This form of interviewing is particularly suited to qualitative research, as it seeks to obtain descriptions of the interviewees' 'life worlds' and to interpret the meanings of their experiences (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 3, 26). Interviews are understood here not simply as neutral tools for data collection, but as sites of knowledge production shaped by interactions and decision making on the spot (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 16, 26). As per Kvale and Brinkmann's suggestion, the interviews began with open questions, in order for the interviewee to use their own words and describe their experience (2009, 25).

As Kvale and Brinkmann note, the research interview is a professional conversation in which the researcher defines the framework and guides the discussion, while remaining attentive to the participant's accounts through follow-up questions (2009, 2-4). The interviews were neither entirely unstructured nor rigidly detailed, however, the interview process has been shaped by a certain design. The time and place of the interviews were agreed upon usually the week before, and took place at the organization where I had booked meeting rooms in advance. The meeting rooms provided increased privacy and a more neutral setting, at the same time contributing to the sense of a professionality, compared to previous spontaneous conversations in the main space of the building.

The interviews were designed and conducted following Kvale and Brinkmann's steps for interviewing (2009, 20). As I was eager to explore the migrant experience in Portugal, thematizing prior to the interviews shaped the interview design. The interview was therefore structured around several central themes that had emerged through prior conversations and observations at the organization. These included the motivation behind migration, and the decision to leave their home country, the legal and bureaucratic processes governing their residency in Portugal, experiences of waiting and uncertainty, access to employment and economic stability, transnational family ties and obligations, and questions of identity. Waiting in particular emerged as a recurring and defining concern across nearly all interactions, which is why it became the central analytical focus of the thesis. While specific questions were posed, new and spontaneous questions arose naturally during the conversations, resulting in interviews

of varying lengths and depth. After the interviews, they were transcribed (if given consent prior), and the data was thematically analyzed using the concepts of the thesis (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 20).

In addition to conducting interviews, ethnographic fieldwork opens up to, and welcomes, fieldnotes, participant observations, and informal interactions; Ethnographic fieldwork is characterized by engagement in everyday activities, 'hanging out', and using ordinary conversations as means of gaining insight (McCall 2006, 4-5). Through my continuous presence in the field, I engaged in both structured interviews and more spontaneous conversations, allowing for a broader and more nuanced understanding of the participants' lives. This includes not only the five men participating in interviews, but other men I came in contact with at the organization. Fieldnotes constituted an important component of the data collection process. Observations, interactions, and reflections I recorded throughout the fieldwork period, capturing both what participants said, and the more subtle dimensions of social life that only became visible through sustained presence in the field.

The selection of interviewees is based on my relationship with the participants at the organization. The specific relationships were not strategically planned, but our continuous contact allowed me to invite them to an interview. The fact that the participants all are non-European citizens was also not strategically planned, but reflect the demographic reality of the organization's members. While I was in contact with members from European countries at the organization, I did not include them in this research as the thesis focuses specifically on non-European nationals. Although observations made more broadly in Lisbon contributed to my initial interest in male migration, the formal data collection, including interviews, field notes, and participant observations, was conducted exclusively within the organization.

3.3 Situated Knowledge

Drawing on Haraway's (1988) concept of situated knowledge, this thesis does not claim to offer an objective or universal account of migrant experience. Haraway argues against what she calls "the God trick"; the pretense of seeing from nowhere, of producing knowledge that appears to come from no particular body, gender, or social location (1988, 581). Such claims to objectivity, she suggests, conceal rather than eliminate the perspectives of those who produce

knowledge, which have historically and disproportionately been those of Western, white, male scientists and scholars. Situated knowledge, by contrast, proposes that genuine objectivity lies in honesty about one's own location and embodiment, rather than in the denial of it (Haraway 1988, 581). Rather than treating my own positioning as a neutral or irrelevant factor, this thesis acknowledges the perspective from which the research has been conducted. As an intern within the NGO, a woman, and someone with a European background living in Lisbon, my presence in the field inevitably shaped what I observed, how I was perceived, and what participants chose to share with me. This is not a matter of listing identity markers, but of recognizing that all knowledge is produced from a particular position, and that this shapes what becomes visible and what does not (Haraway 1988, 581). Being transparent about my situated knowledge is therefore central within my research.

This understanding is relevant to this research, as my position as a young, white, Scandinavian woman conducting research among male migrants from non-European countries, places me in a very specific relational dynamic in the field. I am an outsider to the experiences I am studying, shaped by a cultural, social and gendered background that differs from my participants. This means that what I notice, what I am told, and how I interpret what I observe, are all filtered through a particular perspective that cannot be made neutral. As a woman researching masculinity, I occupied an unusual position that sometimes made participants more willing to open up, as it seemed like several of the men found it easy to speak with me. At the same time, my gender also introduces complications, including being asked inappropriate questions after interviewing, that appeared to be connected to my gender.
This dynamic extended beyond the interview setting in at least one case, as one participant continued to send unsolicited WhatsApp messages inviting me to personal social events after our interview had concluded. This required me to establish clear boundaries. Such encounters are not incidental, but form part of the ethnographic material, and they further illustrate how my position as a woman researcher shaped the dynamics of the fieldwork in ways that this thesis seeks to be transparent about.

Additionally, my extended presence at the organization, first as an intern and later as a volunteer, meant that I was never simply a neutral observer. I was a participant in the social world I was studying, building relationships over time, sharing meals and attending events, and becoming a familiar face to the participants of this thesis. This involvement positioned me in a way that has strengthened my research, but also means that the knowledge produced is

relational and situated, rather than detached and universal. The accounts in this thesis therefore reflect what participants chose to share with me, shaped by who I am and how they perceive me, and is something the thesis seeks to acknowledge openly.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Conducting interviews and ethnographic fieldwork raises a range of ethical questions, not only about how research is carried out, but about what is done with the material it produces (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 16). The knowledge that is produced through an interview is shaped and closely affected by the relationship between interviewer and participant, and this relationship carries responsibilities with it.

My role at the organization has been developed gradually over several months, and I was conscious throughout of wanting potential participants to feel comfortable and safe before agreeing to take part. The relationships I built have therefore over time provided the foundation for this, creating conditions in which participants could speak openly about their experiences (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 16). Before conducting any research, I obtained permission both from the organization and from individual participants with whom I have had informal conversations, ensuring transparency throughout. Prior to each interview, participants were informed that voice recordings would be used to assist with transcription and that these recordings would be deleted afterwards. All names have been anonymized and given pseudonyms to protect participants' identities, and to create a safe environment where they feel like they can speak freely about their experience. In cases where an application or website was used to assist transcription, this was also done with participants' knowledge and consent. Permission to use the organization's space for research purposes was also granted prior to conducting any research.

3.4.1 Use of Artificial Intelligence

The use of artificial intelligence tool Claude (claude.ai) has been utilized in parts of the thesis. It was used in the last stages of the writing process for spell-checking, language feedback, and structural suggestions to ensure cohesiveness and flow throughout the thesis. It was not used generate empirical data, analytical arguments or interpretations, all of which are my own. The

tool was also used to suggest pseudonyms for the participants, to ensuring their anonymity. All citations and sources have been independently retrieved and verified against their original text by the author.

3.5 Limitations

The study focuses on a specific dimension of migration, namely the gendered experience of male migrants from non-European countries, and does not claim to represent the full range of migrant experiences in Lisbon or Portugal. The decision to focus on non-EU migrants reflects the significant differences in legal status, regulatory frameworks, and everyday experience that distinguish non-European nationals from EU-citizens, differences that have proven consequential for access to employment, stability and residency.

The study is based on five in-depth interviews, a relatively small sample. However, the relationships with the participants developed over an extended period, providing a depth of trust and familiarity that may support the quality of the data produced (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 16). The location of the fieldwork introduces a further limitation. The research reflects migration as experienced in one specific city and institutional context, and the findings cannot be generalized beyond this setting. The organization itself may also introduce a form of selection bias, as the people who access its services represent a particular group of the migrant population, namely those who have sought out institutional and social support. Migrants who do not engage with such organizations, or who are in more vulnerable or hidden situations, may not be represented in this research. Language also presents a limitation worth acknowledging. None of the participants, nor myself, are native English speakers. Some nuances may therefore have been lost in translation through the interviews, and participants may not always have been able to fully express complex emotions or experiences in a second language.

My own positionality also carries methodological implications, as mentioned within the section situated knowledge. Participants may have adapted what they shared based on how they perceived me, and my gender in particular appears to have influenced the dynamics of several interactions, as discussed in the situated knowledge section. This required a careful balance throughout the fieldwork between maintaining appropriate professional boundaries, and creating a space where the participants felt open to share their experiences.

The thesis also acknowledges academic limitations. The theoretical framework focuses on a specific set of concepts, and many other analytical perspectives, including a deeper engagement with the female migrant experience, the role of religion, and broader questions of integration, remain beyond the scope of this study. These represent potential directions for future research.

A further limitation concerns the legal and policy overview presented in chapter one. As a non-Portuguese speaker and researcher without legal expertise, the account of Portuguese immigration law and policy offered in this thesis does not claim comprehensive legal accuracy, as already mentioned in the policy section. The policy section was researched as carefully as possible drawing on official legislative sources, but the aspects of the legal framework that received most attention were shaped significantly by what the participants themselves described as relevant to their situations. The thesis therefore reflects the legal landscape as it was experienced and understood by the participants, rather than as a formal legal analysis. Readers seeking a comprehensive or legally precise account of Portuguese immigration law should consult sources with specific legal expertise.

Finally, my own experience as an interviewer is limited. While the semi-structured format allowed for flexibility and conversation, the depth and length of interviews varied, which may have produced some unevenness in the data. The use of self-transcription in one case where a participant requested that no external transcription tool be used, due to concerns about his safety, may also have introduced some bias into the handling of that material, despite efforts to remain as faithful as possible to what was shared.

4 Analysis

This chapter will present a thematic analysis of the empirical data collected through the ethnographic fieldwork. The five participants, Omar, Tariq and Mohammed, Raj and Wei are all male migrants from non-European countries, and have all been living in Portugal for several years each. While their backgrounds, motivations and circumstances for migration differ from each other, they share a defining feature of their migration experience in Portugal; they are all *waiting*. Waiting for residency permits, for employment, for family reunification, and waiting to start the life they came to build. This waiting continues to shape and affect their everyday lives, their sense of identity, and their experience, as well as shape the analysis.

As mentioned in the framework, waiting in this thesis is deeply connected to uncertainty as they do not know *when* the waiting will end. The uncertainty that waiting produces for the male migrants in Portugal, affects masculinity and their transnational lives, which will be argued in the analysis. Rather than isolating waiting and masculinity into separate analytical concepts, the thesis understands them as mutually constitutive. Waiting is the structural condition that runs through each section, while masculinity provides the analytical lens for understanding what that waiting does to the men who experience it. The final section brings these dimensions into direct focus by examining how each man's masculine identity is specifically shaped and negotiated in response to the shared condition of waiting. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue, masculinity is not always named, but is nonetheless present in the ways men understand their roles, their failures, and their sense of self (832, 836).

Drawing on the theoretical framework, the analysis is structured into four thematic sections. The first examines waiting as a structural condition, looking at how waiting is structurally produced through migration infrastructures, and through legal and bureaucratic systems. The second section explores waiting and liminality**,** and the in-between condition that uncertainty and waiting produces, and what it means to be suspended between the social world left behind and the one not yet built. The third extends the analysis across borders, examining how waiting extends transnationally, straining the family ties, obligations, and aspirations that connect the participants to their home countries and imagined futures. The fourth and final section brings masculinity into focus, exploring how waiting disrupts and reshapes masculine identities and provider roles that motivated migration in the first place throughout the different themes in the previous sections. Taken together, the sections argue that waiting is not simply a pause in time, but an active and structuring condition that shapes everyday life, identity, and social navigation within migration.

4.1 "The Prison of Immigration": Waiting as a Structural Condition

Throughout my interactions with both the participants of this thesis, but also with other migrants at the organizations, they all expressed how waiting affected their lives in Portugal. More specifically, when I asked Wei during our interview if he could describe a moment where he felt in-between, neither fully settled nor fully in transit, and how it felt having to wait for

documents, status decisions and stable housing, his answer captured something that runs through all of the accounts in this research:

> "Yes, we call this the prison of immigration in China. Many situations you have to live in a country for a long time to get a residence permit, has been affected by this prison of immigration."

Waiting is therefore one of the central and defining feature of migration experience. It shapes migrants' daily lives, influences their relationships, and limits what is, and what they can and cannot do. As this section will show, the prison of immigration the migrants face, is not accidental. Andersson (2014) argues that these are structural conditions produced by states to control migration, which especially impact those lacking legal, economic, and social resources to navigate the system (796). While this thesis will not explore the reasons behind these policies, it will consider their effects, as they continue to shape the experiences of the migrants in Portugal. The stories of the participants in this research support and show this argument.

What connects all five accounts is not only that they are waiting, but that they arrived in Portugal expecting the process to take a certain amount of time, and that the system has repeatedly failed to deliver what it promised. As we will see, the system changed around them, through the dissolution of SEF, the creation of AIMA, the abolition of the manifestation of interest mechanism, and the growing delays described in the policy section. Even though the migrants had done everything legally and correctly, they now find themselves in suspension. As Isaac (2022) argues, the temporality of migration processes can itself function as a policy of deterrence, as the system becomes increasingly hostile through the management of time, rather than through direct exclusion.

They all expressed not knowing whether the rules governing their applications could change retroactively, and that their legal pathways could now change, even after having spent several years in Portugal already waiting. This illustrates what Andersson (2014) describes as the affective dimensions of migration governmentality, in which state power operates not only through formal policy, but through the climate of uncertainty and fear it produces among migrant populations. They are waiting in a political environment that may change the terms at any moment, without warning and knowledge. This dimension of waiting will further be analyzed and examined.

4.1.1 Wei: Stuck in Transit

Wei's account on the prison of immigration lays the sentiment for how I in this thesis view the migration process, and the effects that waiting has on the migrant experience. As the interview with Wei continued, he explained the journey from China to Portugal. As mentioned, prior to his move, he had made financial investments and bought an apartment in Lisbon he still lives in, as he explained that this would guarantee him a residency permit in Portugal. He had already lived in Portugal for about three years, and explained how he was still waiting for the permit to be issued.

The prison of immigration as he views it, refers to how one has to live in the country one migrates over a longer period of time, before obtaining legal and permanent residency. However, in the case of Wei, he never intended to stay in Portugal long-term, but rather wanted to move to Northern Europe. He expressed a strong sense of dislike towards his life in Portugal, and to the life he was now stuck in waiting. As he never intended to stay in Portugal, this adds another layer to his waiting period, as he experiences waiting in a country he does not want to actually be in.

In this way, Wei's situation carries a different way of waiting than what we will see in the cases of Raj and the brothers. His waiting reflects the same structural condition that the bureaucracy has produced, as his investment was aimed at facilitating residency, but has not been granted yet. Wei has been waiting for his residency for three years, and in his own words he explained that he does not know how many years it may take, due to the new bureaucratic processes and regulations. He expressed a deep worry it might take up to ten years, as the rumors about the new regulations had spread. These rumors are themselves analytically significant. The rumors Wei describes are not simply informal speculation, but reflects a system that has become so unclear and unpredictable that migrants cannot rely on official information to plan their lives. When the rules change without warning, and processing times extend far beyond what was promised, and when nobody can say with confidence what the situation will look like in a year, rumors fill the information vacuum. For Wei, not knowing whether his waiting period will be three years or ten is not simply frustrating, but it makes any form of planning, saving, or forward movement impossible.

Wei finds himself physically present in Portugal, but existentially elsewhere, as the investments made in Portugal were not because he wanted to live there, but because it presented a path into

Europe toward his real goal destination. His wish to go to Northern Europe is a wish for safety, order and a quality of life he believes Portugal cannot offer him in the same way. For Wei, Portugal is a place he is passing through, a temporary place that has become indefinitely prolonged, due to the lack of permanent residency, restricting him to travel and move elsewhere. He expressed several times how he does not want to stay in Portugal, and does not identify with the life he is living there.

Yet, he remains, waiting for the conditions that would allow him to move on. His waiting is therefore frustrating in several ways: he is not only waiting for legal and administrative processes to resolve themselves, but waiting to leave a place he never intended to stay in. Fassin (2011) argue that migration governance function not only through spatial control, but also through temporal mechanisms, a dynamic exemplified by Wei's experience. Although he is physically present in Portugal, Wei remains legally and socially suspended, unable to move forward toward the life he seeks to build elsewhere. For Wei, waiting constitutes a form of the 'prison of immigration', as he is unable to reach his desired destination, and the time in between remains uncertain (Tsoni 2016, 39).

4.1.2 Raj: Waiting Alone

For Raj, the structural character of waiting is felt in relation to the family reunification process. He has been in Portugal for six years, while his wife and son are in India. Even though the legal framework governing family reunification stated that the decision should be issued within three months, as established in the policy section, Raj's process has extended far longer than anticipated without a clear resolution. His condition of waiting is then a product of a system where there is a gap between formal legal rights, and the reality he now experiences. The legal framework promises a three-month timeline, but the administrative delays produced by the transition from SEF to AIMA means that processing times have extended far beyond what the law states, leaving migrants like Raj in a condition of legally produced uncertainty.

When Raj lost his job at the IT company, the structural nature of his waiting became even more visible. He lost his job not because of something he did, but because of something outside of his control. Losing his job not only results in the loss of an income, but also the legal right and pathway for him to obtain the residency and family reunification he has been waiting for. As Isaac (2022) observes, drawing on Hage (2009), bureaucratic power does not only determine what migrants are waiting for, but also produces waiting itself (947). Raj's situation shows how

the system has produced a condition in which different aspects of his life, such as his right to live with his family and ability to plan for the future, are held hostage to administrative processes he has no control over, confirming the prison of immigration. The connection between legal status and employment authorization are directly tied to each other, meaning that losing a job does not only mean losing an income, but losing the legal basis for continued residence or for the family reunification to be issued.

When he first moved to Portugal, he tried to manage the paperwork of the permits after his wife and son had gone back to India. He expressed how he had never been to Europe before moving there, and that it was difficult for him, both economically and emotionally, to be living in Portugal alone without his family:

> "He [an other Indian man in Portugal] was helping taking the documents, for example the NIS and the travel card. Such a long process to do on your own. (...) It's a very big challenge really. Sometimes I get really upset, I decided *ok, it's enough. It's frustrating*. (...) And then I'm thinking so many times '*ok, I just want to go back to India. I just want to go back to India'."

Raj shared how he received support and help in managing the paperwork for the residence permits through an Indian travel agency, where the connections at the agency helped him navigate the bureaucratic world of migration. This informal network of kinship and country-based connections illustrates the migration infrastructure, where it is not individuals, but networks that make migration possible (Xiang and Lindquist 2014; Zuntz 2023). He shared about the times he felt lonely and severely challenged in Portugal, and about how he missed his family, but also that his wife and son were going to visit him in Lisbon in December for a month. Shortly before they arrived, he lost his job, and he has since been searching for new employment.

While he was still working, he would come to the organization after he was done with his shift, to have a place to hang out and people to talk to. He even volunteered at the welcome desk, wanting to give back to the organization which had been such a big part of his new life upon moving to Portugal. After he lost his job, he would go to the organization more often, and expressed how sad he was, and how hard it was looking for a new job. While he was in employment, he seemed more happy and secure in his life in Portugal, even though he was still waiting for s family reunification. This all changed quickly after he lost his job. It then became

obvious with this contrast of before and after, how important employability is in the new life managing the waiting time that is affected by migration policies.

The waiting period Raj experience has become increasingly harder to manage alone, and more uncertain, as he lost his job and by default safety, emphasizing the prison of immigration. His daily life is shaped by a kind of suspended grief, the grief of a man who is separated from the people he loves by processes entirely outside of his control, and now also lacking employability as an anchor for some sort of stability. He is, in Isaac's (2022) terms, temporally dispossessed, stripped of the ability to plan, to build, and to live in accordance with his own timeline due to the bureaucratic infrastructure of the asylum and residency system.

4.1.3 The Brothers: When Trust Becomes a Trap

The brothers' experience of the prison of immigration becomes increasingly clear due to how carefully and consciously they attempted to do everything right and legally:

> "Because I have a passport, a second passport. (...) What I've seen is I have done everything legal in my life. This was from my parents that they taught us. Do everything legally. Once you do everything legally, you're satisfied in your heart. You are not afraid. Once you are not afraid, you're satisfied."

They moved to Portugal by following a legal investment route. They arrived in Portugal in 2022 with capital, a business plan, and with the hope and expectation that their investment would bring them security and new opportunities. Before moving they had invested in the Commonwealth of Dominica, and received passports providing them with a visa-free entrance to Portugal. Then, plan to open a shop, which would allow them to get residency through investments in Portugal. A Pakistani friend who was already living in Portugal helped them find a shop space, and guided them through the bureaucratic processes. Every step they took was legal, intentional, and carefully planned. Back in Pakistan they had been wealthy and well-established men, where they owned land, a house, and worked in professional jobs they enjoyed. Their decision to leave was not only about seeking better economic opportunities, but also due to the political situation in Pakistan they saw no future in. Their move was not desperate or impulsive, but a well-thought-out decision backed by resources.

And yet, the system failed them, not because the legal route they used did not exist, but because the informal infrastructure around it proved exploitable. As explained in the introduction, their Pakistani friend whom they trusted, deliberately mistranslated documents, and used their money without their consent or knowledge, sending their shop to bankruptcy shortly after its opening. They also explained how when they were first looking for an apartment, their Pakistani friend had sent people after them to harass them on the streets outside of their apartment, which happened repeatedly over time. The legal route they had invested in collapsed not because they did anything illegally, but because of the specific vulnerability that migration creates, where there is a dependency on intermediaries, contacts and networks, when navigating an unfamiliar bureaucratic system in a foreign language. As mentioned in Xiang and Lindquist's migration infrastructure (2014), it can be simultaneously liberating and exploitative (126, 133). The migration infrastructure has therefore been a complicating factor the brothers' pathway to residency, sense of safety, and certainty in Portugal.

While they told me they had opened up a shop, they did not specify what kind of store it was, or what they sold. They were hopeful and positive about their new lives in Portugal. As we were talking about the bankruptcy and their economic situation regarding the shop, they expressed a deep frustration specifically towards the person who had helped them. Mohammed, one of the brothers who usually talked the most on behalf of the three of them, told me about how their friendship with this man had stretched over years, both in Pakistan and in Europe. They had provided their friend and his family, more specifically his mother, with economic and emotional support in times of health issues, creating a deep trust and bond between them. Ever since the bankruptcy, Mohammed told me that they were struggling economically, as they have continued to have to pay for the store, without getting anything in return into their account. But, obtaining employability has proven to be difficult, leaving them waiting for economic security:

> "At the moment, my problem is, as I told you, I'm trying to find a job to cover my ends and everything because I lost a lot of money because of corrupt people. Corrupt local people. Local meaning from my country. (...) So I lost the money. The money that I brought into this country so that I would start a business. I did start a business. But it was not successful. I lost it. But I would start again".

Their investments have not given them the security they had anticipated, and they now find themselves waiting for residency they cannot yet obtain, unable to access formal employment in the meantime. Their ability to remain legally and to apply for residency was based on opening a business, the investment route being the legal pathway available to them under the Portuguese Golden Visa framework at the time. When the business collapsed, they lost not only their income and savings, but also the legal foundation of their residency application simultaneously. Their goal of building a new life through entrepreneurship and investment did not simply fail economically, but also legally, socially, and personally at once. Due to this, they find themselves in a position where they are unable to work without a work visa, as their passport only granted a visa-free entrance to Portugal, but not the right to work. Their legal status as therefore dependent on their investment in the store, but as the store closed down, they find themselves navigating through the bureaucratic system without an income.

However, they are trying to find alternative ways to work, and learning new skills. They told me how they are looking for other types of paying job; as Uber-drivers (or similar taxi-services), hospitality positions, anything. However, they explained the process and their limitations in their search for legal jobs, as they do not hold a working visa. In order to obtain a TVDE licensing (the regulatory framework for taxi-services such as Uber and Bolt), the new rules require applicants to pass a driving test conducted in Portuguese. For the brothers who do not yet speak the language, this effectively closed one of the few accessible routes to informal employment available to them. Their options in obtaining employability in Portugal have because of this proven to be limited, and they expressed that they did not anticipate such difficulties to keep them from a sustainable new life in Portugal. They expressed how the Portuguese language requirements keep them from employability, and they are not alone in sharing this frustration and these limitations. Most of the migrants I have talked to came to the organization for two things: for a sense of community, and for a Portuguese language course. The organization does offer language courses, however, these courses only have a few starting periods each year, and the waitlist is long.

The administrative infrastructure of the Portuguese immigration system, including the delays produced by the transition from SEF to AIMA, has effectively frozen their lives in place. As Isaac (2022) argues in the context of Sweden, the temporalities of immigration bureaucracy function not as neutral administrative processes, but as mechanisms that produce and sustain precarity among migrant populations. However, even though the three brothers expressed

frustration of their temporality, when asked about how they felt about their situation and about waiting, their answer was uplifting and positive:

> "In our country, I have something, a big bowl of eggs; It falls down, all the eggs are broken. (...) They say that we don't cry over it, that we lost so many eggs that are broken. Or for example, whatever breaks or something, there's a loss, any kind of loss. We just say it's from God. Maybe there was a big anomaly which had to come. So, with this small loss, God has covered the big loss. So, we just have to convince ourselves. We don't think about these things. It doesn't bother me if it is for 10 years or for 5 years (…)".

The quote shows both resilience, but also a resilience grounded in religious beliefs. They continue to try and find ways to fill their time, as well as new ways to obtain employability; They told me about how they spend their times talking to restaurants owners they come by in the city center, making TikTok and YouTube videos for them for free, constantly developing and learning new skills. They also expressed how they come to the organization to make connections, to talk to other people in the same situation as them, and hopefully to join the waitlist for the Portuguese language course, and eventually get jobs.

The brothers' situation illustrates something slightly different from the state-produced waiting that Raj and Wei experience. Their suspension was not initially created by bureaucratic delay or policy change, but by exploitation within the migration infrastructure itself. As Xiang and Lindquist (2014, 126) show, migration infrastructure can be simultaneously liberating and exploitative, as the brothers have experienced, which continues to produce waiting without a clear end.

4.2 Liminality: Stuck Between Two Worlds

The concept of liminality applied to migration by Malkki (1995a), describes a condition of in-betweenness, of occupying a position between one social world and another without having fully arrived in either. For all five participants, this condition is not metaphorical, but concrete and daily. They are in Portugal, but they are not settled. They have left behind the lives, roles, and social positions they held at home, but they have not yet been able to establish equivalent ones in Portugal. They exist as 'betwixt and between' (1995a, 7), meaning that they are in a liminal position in between different social positions and worlds.

4.2.1 The Brothers: Between Two Lives

For the three Pakistani brothers, Omar, Tariq, and Mohammed, the liminal condition shows the contrast between who they were before they left, and who they are now. In Pakistan they were wealthy, landowning men with professional careers and social standing. The decision to leave was not made from a position of desperation, but deliberate to improve their future. When they arrived in Portugal, they brought with them with financial capital and legal documentation, expecting to build new lives without problems. Instead, they find themselves in uncertainty, within a liminal position. They kept telling me about their lives in Pakistan, and how they had always owned land and houses. They had owned a huge house with a big garden, where they had several cats and chickens walking around freely. They had gone to a private school and spoke English perfectly, they had professional jobs within hospitality and the hotel-business, and expressed a life filled with economic freedom and a certain social status. However, despite their comfort in Pakistan, it did not create a secure future under the political conditions of their home country. When they told me about their lives in Portugal, they shared a story with a big contrast to their previous life; In Lisbon they are making TikTok videos for restaurants, trying to generate some income in the absence of formal employment. They live together with their mother and sister in a rented apartment, where they are kept waiting:

> "I said [to their landlord in Portugal] '*this is the first time ever in life that I'm on a rent'*. I've never lived on rent, and as I'm living on rent I live my mother tells me '*take care of it as it is your own house. Don't break anything'."*

He continued to talk about how their house pets were used to a big house and a big garden. In their rented apartment in Portugal, however, their pets lack sunlight in the house, and food such as chicken, ducks, guinea fowl and turkey, which they were accustomed to back in Pakistan. This comparison between their rented apartment in Portugal, and their house in Pakistan, in which they still own but are unable to sell at the moment, creates a vivid picture of their liminal position they now occupy. The social status they carried in Pakistan has not transferred to Portugal, and it is precisely what Malkki describes when she argues that migrants find themselves outside the national order of things, no longer classified within one social order and not yet classified within another. The brothers occupy a position not only legally, but socially and economically, suspended between the men they were, and the men they are trying to become. This also captures something else important about the brothers' situation: They are not Pakistani in the way that they were at home, where their identities were grounded in land,

community and social standing. But they are not Portuguese either, and the Portuguese system has not yet granted them the legal status that would allow them to begin building a new social position. They are suspended between two lives and two worlds, not fully belonging in either.

4.2.2 Wei: Passing Through

Wei's liminality takes a different form. He experiences Lisbon as a waiting room rather than a destination, a place where he is marking time until he can move to Scandinavia. This produces a particular kind of in-betweenness, as he is present in Portugal, but not emotionally invested in it, neither rooted in the country he left nor arrived in the country he is heading toward. His social life and his sense of self are oriented elsewhere, toward a future that remains out of reach. He is separated from the social world he left behind, but has not yet been incorporated into the one he is heading toward, occupying the threshold condition Malkki (1995a, 8) draws on Turner's framework of ritual passage.

He is explicitly and consciously using Portugal as a transit point, a place to pass through rather than to settle in. He does not attempt to integrate, does not wish to stay, and does not identify with the migrant community around him. In a striking contradiction that is itself analytically significant, Wei expresses a discomfort with migrants, despite being one himself. During one of the dinners at the organizations I frequently went to, he expressed how he did not trust or like migrants, and that they were all thieves who were out to get his money. In the attempt to reject his statement, I quickly answered that I myself, as well as my friends, also were migrants, but it did not seem to make a difference in his opinion.

This disavowal of his own migrant identity can be understood as a form of what Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) describe as complicit masculinity, an attempt to distance oneself from a subordinated social position, by aligning symbolically with a dominant one. Even through his actual circumstances place him as a migrant, Wei attempts to claim and occupy a more elevated position within the social hierarchy of migration, as he imagines himself as different and distances himself from the migrants around him. His liminality is therefore not only geographical and legal, but also psychological, as he refuses the identity that is situation would assign him.

4.2.3 Raj: Neither Here nor There

Raj's liminality is perhaps the most emotionally weighted of all five cases. He has been in Portugal for several years, he has lost his job, and carries the additional burden of being separated from his family, by legal processes that have now stretched across six years. He is a husband and a father, but he cannot fulfil those roles in any daily, embodied sense. As his son continues to grow up in India, Raj can only participate as a parent through videocalls and text messages. He would show me photos of his family, both of his brother, his parents, and his wife and son, showing pride and love for them. This liminal condition was deepened during Covid lockdown shortly after he moved to Portugal, when he lost his income and found himself dependent on money sent from his family in India. He shared how his family had been sending him money to cover his rent and living costs: “My family supported me. They [were] sending the money to me to live here”. The reversal of financial flow that had justified his migration, placed him in a condition of dependency that deepened his sense of suspension. He had come to Portugal expecting to build a stable life, and instead found himself unable to move forward, supported by the very family he had come to support.

The organization provides a place for him that to him feels like home, especially in times of difficulty: “I really missed [my family] and I feel alone. And you know, it’s a really hard time. Really, really hard. At the time, I was visiting here [the organization] every day”. While he was experiencing loneliness after having left his social world in India behind, the organization became a place in Portugal where he felt like he belonged, filling the space left by the social world he had left behind. He exists in a state of uncertainty, neither fully present in Portugal, nor able to return to the life he left behind. He is a provider who cannot provide, and exists in a liminal space between the family life he is trying to build, and the one he left behind, connected to both, and fully present in neither. When his wife and son visited him in December, this liminal position may even have been intensified, making the separation feel more concrete, and the waiting more acute. This is liminality not as an abstract theoretical condition, but as a lived and felt experience of suspension, of being a man whose life is on hold.

What is significant about the liminal condition these men share is that it is not temporary in any meaningful sense. As Tsoni (2016, 36) argues, liminality in migration contexts is not a bounded phase with a clear beginning and an end. For these men, the endpoint to their waiting is uncertain, and their liminality is open-ended produced by bureaucratic and institutional

processes. This is what makes the waiting they experience so heavy, not only its length, but the absence of any clear endpoint that would allow them to begin again.

4.3 Transnational Ties and the Weight of Distance

All five participants continue to maintain connections and ties to their home countries that influence their daily lives and sense of identity. As Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) argue, transnational migrants do not simply abandon one world, but instead live simultaneously across multiple worlds, maintaining ways of being and ways of belonging that connect them to more than one place. For these men, this simultaneity provides both meaning and pressure.

4.3.1 Raj: Life between Portugal and India

For Raj, the transnational aspects of his experience are defined by the separation between Portugal and India, as his wife and son remain in India while he has lived in Portugal for six years without them. Their month-long visit in December provided only a small break of separation, and he has continued to carry the emotional weight of the distance after their departure. Raj's transnational family situation is not only a personal matter, but also a structural issue shaped by family reunification policies that were officially expected to be processed within three months.

Raj's transnational life is maintained not only across between Lisbon and India, but also reproduced within Lisbon itself. Since his arrival in Portugal, he has been living with an Indian family he got in contact with through an Indian travel agency. His living arrangement provides not only practical support, but a form of domestic and cultural familiarity, allowing him to navigate daily life in Portugal in ways that feel familiar, through shared food, language, and cultural practices. As Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) describe, transnational ways of being are not only about maintaining connections across borders, but about the everyday practices that sustain a sense of cultural identity in their host country (1010).

This connection to India is further maintained through the digital contact of everyday practices. After work, Raj would spend his evenings at the organization, often on video calls with his family in India. His mother would call to say goodnight as she prepared for bed, exemplifying the time difference that is present in the transnational ties. This kind of spontaneous and unplanned contact reflect the way digital communication has transformed transnational life,

making geographical distances feel shorter and allowing migrants to maintain a presence in both worlds (Madianou and Miller 2012, 95).

Raj articulated a duality of transnational living when asked if he wants to return to India. His response captures the tension between two worlds that defines the transnational migrant experience: "Yes. I really miss my India. I mean, I want to. I want to see my family. And then after I'll be here, and you know, I'm earning money. And also this lifestyle is adapting me (…)".

In a few sentences, Raj articulates what Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) describe as the simultaneity of transnational life, the experience of belonging to two places at once without being fully present in either. He misses *his* India and wants to return, while he also describes Portugal as a place that has adapted him, and has become part of who he is after six years. Rather than describing himself as adapting to Portugal, he describes Portugal as acting on him, suggesting a process of transformation that has happened to him over the years of waiting rather than something he actively chose. This might also be a translation limitation, as he might have meant that he has adapted to Portugal. Either way, he has become someone who belongs partly to Portugal even as he longs for India, and this in-between belonging is itself a product of the uncertainty of waiting that has kept him there.

Raj's experience of transnational waiting takes a different but equally weighted form. He left India to build a better life for his wife and son, motivated by the expectation that migration would allow him to provide for his family in ways that staying in India would not. Six years later, he remains separated from them, sustained by the hope that the family reunification process will eventually be resolved, but exhausted by the length and uncertainty of the wait. As Gallo and Scrinzi (2016) describe through the figure of the waiting husband, migrant men who are separated from their families by the migration process, find themselves suspended between their role as providers and husbands and their inability to fulfill those roles across transnational distance. For Raj, every month of waiting for family reunification is a month in which he is absent from his son's life, unable to be the father and husband his masculine identity demands of him. The sadness and stress he describe are not simply individual emotional responses, but the affective consequences of a masculine identity that is being sustained across an impossible distance.

4.3.2 The Brothers: Between Two Lives

For Omar, Tariq, and Mohammed, the transnational dimension of their experience is shaped by a distinct dynamic. They left Pakistan not only in pursuit of personal opportunities, but in response to a political situation that offered no viable future. Their ties to Pakistan are therefore complicated, as they cannot simply return, and yet Portugal has not become home either, due to economic obstacles and uncertainty. They told about how they live together with their mother and sister, in a rented apartment in the outskirts of Lisbon. As they live together, they have brought a fragment of their family world with them to Lisbon, maintaining a form of domestic and familial continuity even in displacement.

This shared household is itself a transnational way of living; a piece of Pakistani family life transplanted into a Lisbon apartment, as it functions as both a support structure, and a reminder of what they have left behind. Gallo and Scrinzi (2016) describe how migration transforms the way gendered family relations are lived and imagined across transnational spaces, and the brothers' situation illustrates this transformation in a very specific way: they are present with some of their family, but separated from the broader social world and economic context, in which their family once had standing and security.

Their journey to Portugal was influenced and facilitated, as mentioned, by economic means and opportunities. They continued to tell me about how they still own land in Pakistan, but due to the governmental policies and implementations, they are facing losing even more money and economic resources, further emphasizing their transnational lives and how they extend across borders:

> “Because the properties that I have in my country, I can’t sell it. The problem is that once you’re not there, the price for example, the price of the land, it has reduced by 60%. (...) Since the corrupt regime, since three-four years. Everything has gone down. So if I try to sell anything, it would be at a loss of 60% and that is also very hard. So then it is better to wait and then if it goes up again (…). So for that, I’m putting in so much energy to sell it, I can’t. I’ve told so many friends of mine to sell the property so that I need money, I need money. So then they transfer it, but they can’t.”

Their continued communication and extended contact with friends back in Pakistan, trying to figure out how to best deal with their property and assets. They kept on explaining how they

will keep their properties in Pakistan until selling will not result in an even greater economic loss, and that they hope the political situation will change for the better. Migration does not cut off the social ties that connect people to their countries of origin, such as in this case. As Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) argue, transnational migrants maintain simultaneous connections across borders, sustaining familial, economic, and social relationships that span the distance between their country of origin, and their host country, which is visible for the brothers as well.

Waiting in this context is not only a condition experienced in Portugal, but one that extends transnationally, operating simultaneously across borders. The quote above shows the layered and transnational nature of their waiting. They are simultaneously waiting in Pakistan for a political and economic situation to stabilize enough to allow them to recover what they have lost, and waiting for their lives in Portugal to start. They describe a corrupt regime in Pakistan that is holding them back in selling the land and property they own. They also describe the betrayal of their Pakistani friend in Portugal, who they had previously considered a close friend, a connection that was supposed to function as a piece of home abroad and bring them stability in an unfamiliar country.

These two betrayals, one by a political system and one by a trusted friend, have produced a layered distrust that extends across both their home country and their new life in Portugal. The corrupt regime they left is the same regime that has devalued the land they depend on. Migration has not allowed them to escape this political reality, but has instead left them exposed to it from a distance, unable to act on it and unable to return to manage the properties directly. Their waiting is therefore not located only in Portugal, but stretched across two countries simultaneously, a condition of double suspension that intensifies the temporality of their new lives.

4.3.3 Wei: The Hope for a Future Life

Wei's transnational situation is oriented not backward towards a home he has left, but forward towards a destination he has not yet reached. Scandinavia represents for him a social world organized around values he associated with safety, order, and quality of life, and the hope of getting a girlfriend to share his life with. His transnational ties are therefore not ties to his old life in China, but ties for aspiration, connections to an imagined future. Yet, the waiting he

experiences in Portugal is no less real for being forward-looking. Every year in Lisbon is a year further from the life he is trying to build elsewhere, a year in which the aspirations that brought him to Europe in hold. His transnational waiting is experienced as time stolen from a future that remains temporarily out of reach.

Even though he shared how he does not want to stay in Portugal, he has been attempting building a life here that includes connections to his home country. When asked how his first days in Portugal had been, he told me how he had intentionally seeked out restaurants and stores owned by Chinese people. This can be seen as a conscious effort and attempt to make his life in Portugal feel more familiar, as these connections to people from his home country might help make the transition to his new life in Lisbon easier. His ties to China are present, but he expresses a desire to move forward, away from where he has been, toward Scandinavia. However, he did express a deep disagreement with China, as well as a feeling of distrust towards both the Chinese government, but also Chinese people. His reasoning for moving in the first place was indeed motivated by his political beliefs, and did not want to live in China due to the government and their politics. His relationship to his country of origin does not appear to be a source of pressure in the same way as for Raj or the brothers. Instead, his transnational orientation is toward a future destination rather than a past home. Yet, even this desire of moving forward is frozen by his current liminal condition. He cannot move toward Scandinavia until his legal situation in Portugal is resolved, which means his transnational aspiration is itself caught in the same structure of waiting that defines all five participants' experiences.

What connects these different transnational experiences, is the way in which distance amplifies the effects of waiting, and how waiting in turn strains the transnational ties through which masculine identity is maintained and obligations that connect these men to their home countries and imagined futures.

4.4 Masculinity Under Pressure: Identity, Provision, and Uncertainty

While the previous sections of the analysis have examined waiting, liminality and transnational ties as conditions shared across all participants, this section will analyze how each man’s

masculine identity is shaped and negotiated differently in response to those shared conditions. The different experiences between Raj, the three brothers Omar, Tariq and Mohammed, and Wei, are not incidental, but reflect the intersecting social positions they occupy separately, and it is these differences that make individual attention necessary.

This section brings masculinity into focus, examining how waiting affects the gendered dimensions of the participants' identities and lives. As argued throughout the thesis, migration is not a gender-neutral experience, and neither is waiting. Before turning to the individual accounts, it is worth noting the further dimension of the masculine space that the organization represented. The men in this research were visible, present and socially active within the organization in ways that shaped the conditions of the fieldwork itself. Their occupation of shared spaces was not only demographic, but also social, producing an environment where masculine identity could be performed, sustained, and recognized, even during conditions of waiting. As mentioned in the field site section, this masculine presence created consequences for female members, some of whom found the organizations' shared spaces and environment difficult to access due to the male friendships and connections. The organization is therefore a space where masculine social bonds were produced, maintained and performed collectively, even under conditions that had removed material foundations.

For the migrant men in this research, the experience of uncertainty cannot be understood without attending to the masculine expectations that shaped their decision to migrate in the first place, and that continue to define how they navigate their situation. As Donaldson and Howson (2009, 211) argue, migrant men's sense of masculine identity is closely tied to paid work and the breadwinner role, which does not disappear when they cross borders. All of the stories of the participants show how the motivation behind their migration was influenced by bettering their lives, both in relation to work opportunities and general life conditions they did not feel they could achieve in their home countries.

For Raj, moving to Portugal meant that he would be able to provide for his family back in India, but also for a future together with his family in Europe through family reunification. For Omar, Tariq and Mohammed, they left their properties and jobs behind in Pakistan, made financial investments that allowed them to move to Portugal, with the goal of building a new and better life in the host country. For Wei, his end goal as he explained, was to eventually move to Northern Europe and get a girlfriend. In this context, migration can be seen as a way an

enactment these ideals, demonstrating initiative, ambition, and the capacity to pursue a better future (Donaldson and Howson 2009; Wojnicka 2019).

4.4.1 Raj: Masculinity as Adaptation and Aspiration

Raj's intersectional position is shaped by the combination of his gender, legal status, economic situation, and the transnational ties to his family in India, that structure his daily life in Portugal. He arrived in Portugal as a provider, a husband and a father, and has remained separated from his wife and son for six years. He lost his job during the ethnographic period, and has been unable to find employment since. As mentioned, the economic roles were changed during Covid, when his family in India began supporting him financially in Portugal. As he was telling me his story, he expressed a deep sense of sadness around his economic situation, both at the time during lockdown in relation to Covid-19, but also when he recently had lost his job. As Donaldson and Howson (2009) argue: "Male migrants often feel unhappiness when they are not able to meet their families' needs, and their masculine identity is challenged" (Haggis and Schech 2009, 68). This reversal of the expected financial flow, from migrant provider to family dependent, represents a significant rupture in the masculine role that motivated his migration in the first place. Raj left India to provide for his family, yet found himself in a situation where his family was providing for him. Instead of seeing this as a personal failure, it can represent a structural consequence of waiting, where Raj's inability to work, earn, and provide is imposed by the bureaucratic and institutional constraints within the migration process.

This also raises a broader question that runs through Raj's story, such why he continues to stay in Portugal, and why it is socially acceptable, even expected, that he remains in Portugal separated from his family, dependent on their support, and unable to fulfill the provider role that justified his departure in the first place. The answer lies partly in the weight of masculine expectation within migration itself (Donaldson and Howson 2009, 210). Having committed to the migration project, returning without having achieved its goals would represent a form of masculine failure that may feel more unbearable than staying and continuing to wait. The migration, once undertaken, becomes its own trap, sustained by the same masculine ideals that initiated it. Yet despite the sadness and stress Raj describes, his story reflects a masculinity defined by resilience and ambitions which means that waiting has not been entirely extinguished. When our conversation turned to work, Raj reframed his identity in striking

terms: "You know, I'm a traveler actually." He went on to describe his love of Dubai, its business culture, and its investment opportunities, and to outline a vision for his future involving a gold and diamond trading business connecting Dubai and India, which he had previously been involved in:

> "I'm buying gold and then selling to India. And everyone loves gold. And I have the idea in the future. I'd like to do it again, you know, the gold business. Now I'm doing IT at the same time, I'm thinking about the gold and diamonds. Even I like diamonds, diamonds are the best."

Raj's account demonstrates how he reproduces a form of masculinity centered around entrepreneurship, mobility, and economic ambition even under severe constraints. First, by positioning himself as a traveler and a businessman with global connections and future plans, he refuses the identity of a man who is simply stuck and waiting. Second, the account reveals the transnational scope of his masculine imagination. His vision of himself is not anchored in Portugal or even in India, but moves within a transnational field across Lisbon, Dubai, and India. This suggests a cosmopolitan masculine self-image, although frustrated by the waiting process, has not been eliminated. Third, the account exemplifies what Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) describe as the negotiation of masculine identity under constraint. Men in marginalized or suspended positions continue to assert and perform masculine ideals through other means. In Raj's case this is achieved through aspiration, vision, and the articulation of future plans that restore a sense of agency and forward momentum to a present otherwise lacking these qualities.

4.4.2 Brotherhood and Shared Masculinity

The brothers' intersectional positions shaped by a particular contrast between the class capital they brought with them, and the current situation they are navigating. Additionally, their masculinity is not performed individually, but collectively, as they navigate their new lives in Portugal together. They are making decisions, sharing a rented apartment, supporting one another, and facing the consequences of their migration as a shared project. In much of the literature on masculinity and migration, the focus is on individual men and how they negotiate and perform masculinity, but the brothers challenge this individualist focus on masculinity. Their masculinity is sustained not only through personal motivation or resilience, but through the bond between them. They moved to Portugal together, opened the shop together, and lost

their investment together. Because they were always together, and in their own words shared the same experience and challenges, I agreed to conduct a shared interview with the three of them, as I found this shared experience interesting in itself. The shared nature of their experience means that the weight of waiting is distributed between the three, and that masculine identity is maintained through mutual recognition and solidarity.

This form of brotherly and shared masculinity carries its own gendered expectations. As the men of the family, they share a collective responsibility for the wellbeing of their mother and sister, who came to Portugal with them. Whenever we spoke, they never mentioned what the mother and sister were doing, but always referred to themselves when talking about employability, investments and their failed shop. I found this interesting, as it confirms the masculine identity they hold and share, and how they view themselves as the caretakers and providers of the family. As their business in Portugal failed, the brothers can no longer fulfill this provider role, creating a shared masculine burden between the three. As one of the brothers expressed, they were taught to always do things legally, and it is this legal conduct that brings them peace of mind regardless of the outcome. This reflects a particular form of masculine honor, which is not only organized around economic success, but also around moral integrity, which brings them a sense of dignity and reassurance that they did everything the right and legal way.

Further, the eggs-metaphor the brothers told is worth returning to here. When asked about their situation and their waiting, Mohammed shared a saying from their culture: that when a bowl of eggs falls and breaks, you do not cry over it, because God has covered a larger loss with a smaller one. This shows an active masculine philosophy of endurance, rooted in religion and cultural belief, that allows them to maintain dignity, respect, and a sense of calm in a situation that has stripped away most of the material markers of masculine status they held in Pakistan. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, 832) argue, hegemonic masculine ideals often operate unnamed, embedded in everyday practice and cultural belief rather than consciously articulated. For the brothers, this attachment to masculine dignity is expressed collectively rather than individually, through a shared cultural and religious framework that gives the waiting meaning rather than leaving it as pure loss.

Their continued presence at the organization, speaking English, making connections, and staying active in an international environment, also reflects a collective effort to maintain the social self-image they brought from Pakistan. They were educated, professionally experienced,

globally mobile men. Coming to the organization and engaging in activities is a way of performing that identity in a context that has otherwise made it difficult. The masculinity they sustain is not only about provision and economic agency, but about social standing. In the absence of formal employment and income, the organization becomes one of the few spaces where this form of masculine identity can still be expressed and recognized, and a place they can feel like their old selves. At the same time, the organization offers a place they can connect with other migrants in the same situation as them, creating a common ground and a new way of belonging. What the brothers show is that masculinity under pressure of waiting, both for economic stability and resolution, for residence permits and certainty, is not only an individual negotiation, but a collective one. Brotherhood provides a structure of mutual support, shared responsibility, and collective resilience that individual men navigating the same conditions alone do not have access to. This does not necessarily make their waiting easier, but provides a social and emotional support system, where the masculine identity can be sustained and performed.

Through my conversations with the brothers, I also noticed an internal dynamic that was consistent throughout both the interview and other informal interactions. Mohammed, the middle brothers, tended to speak most frequently and on behalf of the three of them, with his brothers confirming and elaborating on the stories, rather than leading the conversations themselves. Mohammed seemed to occupy a position of spokesperson within their group, presenting their shared experience with confidence and fluency, while his brothers remained closely engaged. However, to describe their relationship only as a masculine hierarchy, we would miss something important, as the Omar and Tariq were far from passive. They were consistently warm, enthusiastic, and deeply eager to share their lives, pulling out their phones to show videos they made, talking about Pakistan with visible pride and energy. There was a brightness and playfulness about them whenever they spoke, a lightness in their eyes when they spoke about home, about their work, their plans, that showed a contrast to the weight of their circumstances. Their masculinity was expressed not only through endurance and resilience, but also through this enthusiasm, through the desire to be known and recognized for who they are beyond the label of waiting migrants. Mohammed may have spoken for the group, but all three were present in the fullest sense, invested in the conversation and in being seen.

This dynamic suggests that collective masculinity is not simply a uniform front, but contains its own internal structure. Connell (2005) notes that masculinity operates at multiple scales

simultaneously, and the brothers illustrate this precisely. Between themselves and the broader social world, they present a unified masculine solidarity. Within the group, subtle differentiations of role, voice, and authority are present, and beneath both there is a shared masculine pride in who they were and who they continue to be, expressed through memory, creativity, and the insistence on being more than their current suspension allows them to see.

4.4.3 Wei: Masculinity Through Distinction, Aspiration, and Refusal

Wei's masculinity stands apart both Raj and the brothers. Raj's masculinity is centered around provision and family obligations, while the brothers' focus on collective solidarity and shared dignity. In contrast, Wei's defines himself as being different from and superior to the circumstances and people that surround him in Lisbon.

In contrast to the brothers, who have lost their investment and find themselves economically suspended, Wei owns property. He purchased an apartment in Lisbon that he partly lives in but also rents out the spare bedroom, meaning that he can uphold a degree of economic agency and uphold his masculine identity through assets. It positions him as both an investor and a property owner, rather than simply a migrant waiting for administrative processes to be resolved. In the context if Connell's hegemonic masculinity, Wei's property ownership gives him access to a form of economic masculine status that partially preserves his self-image, in contrast to his legal status. He may not have permanent residency, but he has an asset, which is central to how he understands and presents himself. When asked what he does for work, he said that he does not work, but also that he has no desire to work, as he manages through his ownership of an apartment, making him financially independent.

He purchased an apartment in Lisbon, where he resides part-time and rents out the spare bedroom. This arrangement enables him to maintain a degree of economic agency and reinforce his masculine identity through asset ownership. As a result, Wei is positioned as both an investor and a property owner, rather than solely as a migrant awaiting administrative resolution.

Yet, this economic positioning coexists with a visible sense of displacement. Wei never intended to stay in Portugal and does not identity with the life he is living there. His aspirations are directed entirely toward Northern Europe, which he associates with safety, order, and a

quality of life. Significantly, part of this aspiration revolves around finding a Scandinavian girlfriend, an aspiration he also expressed to me during our interview. Within hegemonic masculinity, the desire for a partner from a socially dominant cultural context, reflects an attempt to claim masculine status through intimate alliance, to align oneself with a world that offers recognition, stability, and belonging in ways that his current situation in Portugal does not. As Connell and Messerschmidt observe, men who find themselves in subordinated or marginalized positions within the masculine hierarchy, frequently seeks to reclaim this status through alternative means. For Wei, this imagined Scandinavian future including his girlfriend, safety and social order, creates a contrast to the current masculine identity he holds.

His distrust of other migrants, including other Chinese people in Lisbon, further illustrates this dynamic. By positioning himself as critically minded, politically aware and culturally distinct from other migrants around him, Wei constructs a masculine identity organized around individual exceptionalism. As he distances himself from other migrants, he constructs a masculine identity and creates a masculine performance, that draws on intellectual, cultural capital, additionally to economic superiority. Yet, the material reality of Wei's everyday life was in contrast to this self-image he created. Despite positioning himself as an investor and property owner, wary and distrusting of other migrants, Wei appeared in interactions at the organization in worn-out clothes with holes, carrying an old broken plastic water bottle, and arriving on a bicycle that, as he explained, he had attempted to modify to run on renewable energy, though it remained a standard bike. These details, observed consistently across several encounters, suggest a way of living that is more frugal and constrained than his self-image as a man of means and global aspiration would imply. His apartment may cover his basic needs and costs, providing economic security that the others participants lack, but his everyday life reflects a careful and frugal existence that he does not openly acknowledge.

This gap between self-presentation and material reality is itself analytically significant. He performs a masculine identity organized around economic distinction and cultural superiority, yet his lived reality does not fully support it. By presenting a particular self to the world regardless of the reality he does not necessarily share, he negotiates his masculine identity. For Wei, maintaining the performance of the successful investor who is simply passing through Portugal on his way to a better life, requires not only aspiration, but also a sustained self-image. His masculinity is in this sense performatively demanding, requiring active and ongoing work to sustain it.

4.5 Summary

In all three cases, masculinity is not only challenged by the experience of waiting, but is also actively renegotiated within this context. Raj adapts by sustaining a cosmopolitan and entrepreneurial masculine self-image grounded aspiration and vision. The brothers collectively endure, maintaining dignity and social identity through brotherhood, cultural philosophy, and shared presence. Wei insists by asserting, through distinction and aspiration, that Portugal does not define his narrative and his real life remains ahead. Although none of these strategies resolves the condition of waiting, each demonstrates a refusal to surrender to it. As previously argued, masculinity not only subject to damage by waiting, but also shapes how these men experience, endure, and resist the condition of waiting.

The organization, in this context, functions not only as a waiting room but also as a space where alternative forms of masculine identity can be partially sustained. These identities are organized around community, presence, and perseverance rather than economic provision and formal employment. 'The prison of immigration', as Wei described it, is not only a bureaucratic condition but also a gendered one, experienced differently by each man depending on the intersectionality he brings into his period of suspension.

5 Conclusion

This thesis has explored how uncertainty and waiting shapes the masculine identities of male migrants from non-European countries living in Lisbon. Drawing on nine months of fieldwork at a local organization, it has brought together the stories of five participants: Omar, Tariq, and Mohammed from Pakistan; Raj from India; and Wei from China. The study demonstrates how waiting is produced not only through bureaucratic infrastructure, but also as a gendered and structured force that shape their everyday lives.

The participants in this research did not migrate in a social or cultural vacuum. They left countries where they occupied specific social positions, often defined by their roles as providers, breadwinners, and men of standing and ambition. Migration itself can be seen as motivated by masculine ideals, such as initiative and pursuit of a better future. Recognizing and analyzing these gendered dimensions of waiting has constitutes a central contribution to this thesis.

The theoretical framework has been instrumental to interpreting what the participants described and their experiences. Hegemonic masculinity established what was expected of these men and why waiting significantly impacts their sense of self, and how the masculine roles are continuously reshaped. Temporality has shown that this suspension is not accidental, but how it can be structurally produced through the institutional management of time within the immigration systems and migration infrastructures. Liminality has captured the in-between condition of being suspended between the social world they left behind, and the one not yet built. The transnational framework showed that the consequences of waiting extend across borders, felt in Pakistan, India, and in an imagined future in Northern Europe. Intersectionality explains why waiting affects each man differently, shaped by the overlapping dimensions of legal status, class, nationality, and cultural background. Together these frameworks allowed the analysis to show that waiting is not simply a pause in time, but a condition that reshapes identity, transnational relationships, and masculine self-understanding, all at the same time.

Several key findings emerged from the application of these frameworks. First, waiting is productive rather than passive. It does not simply pause life but actively reshapes it, reorganizing daily routines, social relationships, and self-understanding around the bureaucratic processes that operate independently of the people they affect. Second, the masculine project of migration is deeply vulnerable to waiting. The provider role, the breadwinner identity, and the aspiration for economic independence that motivated departure in the first place, are precisely the dimensions of masculine identity that waiting most directly denies. Third, the men in this research do not simply endure this condition. They negotiate it, resist it, and find creative ways of sustaining a sense of self within it. The brothers make TikTok videos and try to find new ways to navigate their new reality. Raj reimagines himself as a global businessman and traveler, and gives back to the NGO by volunteering, placing him inside the organization, and not just as a member and migrant. Wei maintains a forward-looking masculine aspiration directed toward a future he has not yet reached, and positions himself above the migrants he meets at the organization. Fourth, waiting is a transnational condition, as it stretches from Portugal across borders, connecting administrative delays to political instability in Pakistan, family separation in India, and unfulfilled aspirations towards Northern Europe.

These findings contribute to scholarship on the gendered dimensions of migration, and the role of temporality shaping migrant lives. They indicate that migration policy cannot be regarded

as gender-neutral, and that the bureaucratic production that waiting has particular consequences for the men subject to it, shaped by who they are, where they come from, and what they brought with them when they left. This thesis has focused on a small and specific group of men in one city, and does not claim to offer a generalized explanation of male migration elsewhere. Instead, what it offers is a situated and grounded account of how waiting is experienced in this particular context, reflecting what Haraway reminds us; all knowledge is produced from somewhere.

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